When I am Among Friends, I am Least Disabled:

A Theological Examination of the Significance of Friendship for the Inclusion of Physically Disabled People in Baptist Church Communities

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Contents

Abstract 6

Declaration 7

Copyright Statement 8

Acknowledgements 9

About the Author 10

Chapter 1 Introduction 11

1.1 Landscape of Disability 11

1.2 Background of Thesis 13

1.3 Terminology used in this Thesis 14

1.4 Methodology and Outline of Chapters 17

Part 1 The Experience of Exclusion and Inclusion ***23***

Chapter 2 The View from Where I Sit 24

2.1 Introduction 24

2.2 Critical Reflection on my Experiences of Exclusion and Inclusion 24

2.2.1 The Changing Physical Environment 24

2.2.2 The Changing Nature of Language About Disability 27

2.2.3 The Changing Sociological Understanding of Disability 29

2.2.4 The Changing Theological Understanding of Disability 31

2.2.5 Interconnections 32

2.3 Placing my Experience in Wider Context 33

2.3.1 British Baptist Context 34

2.3.2 Ecumenical Context 39

2.3.3 Wider Society 41

2.4 Recognising a Disconnection Between My Experience and That of Others 44

2.5 Research Question 45

2.6 Conclusion 45

Part 2 Exploring the Barriers to the Inclusion of Disabled People ***47***

Introduction to Part 2 47

Chapter 3 Disability and Metaphorical Language 48

3.1 Introduction 48

3.2 The Metaphorical Nature of Language 48

3.3 Metaphor Groups and Paradigms 51

3.4 Metaphors and Disability 53
3.4.1 'Direct' and 'Indirect' Metaphors of Disability 53
3.4.2 Metaphors that Influence Understandings of Disability 56
3.5 God as Friend 60
3.6 Interim Conclusion 64

Chapter 4 Disability and Sociological Models 65

4.1 Introduction 65
4.2 Individual/Medical Model of Disability 65
4.2.1 Origins 66
4.2.2 The Continuing Impact of the Individual/Medical Model of Disability 70
4.3 Social Models of Disability 72
4.3.1 UK Social Model of Disability 72
4.3.2 USA Minority Group Model of Disability 76
4.3.3 Other Social Models 77
4.4 Beyond the Social Models 78
4.5 Interim Conclusion 79

Chapter 5 Disability and Theology 81

5.1 Introduction 81
5.2 The Emergence of Disability Theology 81
5.3 Survey of Disability Theology Approaches 83
5.3.1 Foundations 84
5.3.2 A Gentle Touch 89
5.3.3 Disabled God 91
5.3.4 Interdependent God 94
5.3.5 Accessible God 95
5.3.6 A Deaf Church Perspective 98
5.3.7 A Vulnerable God 101
5.3.8 God of Limits 103
5.3.9 A Pastoral Care Model of Disability 105
5.4 Positionality of Writers 108
5.5 Shifting the Perspective 110
5.6 Moving from General Relationships to Friendship 111
5.7 Interim Conclusion 112

Conclusion to Part 2 113

Part 3 Theological Reflection on Trinity, Covenant and Inclusion 114

Chapter 6 Baptists, Trinity, Covenant and Ecclesiology 115

6.1 Introduction 115
6.2 The Baptist Context 115
6.3 The Relational Trinity 119
6.3.1 The Context 119
6.3.2 Persons as Relation 121
6.3.3 Participation 122
6.4 Theological Implications for Disability Theologies 126
6.4.1 Intercessions 128
6.4.2 Suffering 133
6.4.3 Forgiveness 136
6.4.4 Spiritual Gifts 138
6.4.5 Sacramental lives 139
6.5 Pastoral Implications of a Relational Trinity 141
6.5.1 Pastoral Implications of 'Persons as Relation' 141
6.5.2 Pastoral Implications of 'Participation' 148
6.6 Contemporary Covenant Relationships and Baptist Ecclesiology 150
6.6.1 Covenant 150
6.6.2 Ecclesiology 155
6.7 Conclusion 158

Part 4 Response: Friendship as Way of Fostering Participatory Inclusion 159

Chapter 7 Friendship and Baptist Covenant Communities 160

7.1 Introduction 160
7.2 The Potential for Friendship 160
7.3 Metaphorical Friendship 165
7.4 Emerging Themes and The Nature of Friendship 167
7.4.1 Intentionality and Friendship 167
7.4.2 Mutuality and Friendship 170
7.4.3 Particularity and Friendship 172
7.4.4 Friendship as Intentional, Mutual and Particular 174
7.5 Friendship and Disability Theologies 175
7.5.1 Intentionality 176
7.5.2 Mutuality 179
7.5.3 Particularity 180
7.6 Friendship and Fiddes's Relational Trinity 181
7.7 Friendship, Disability and Baptist Church Communities 182
7.7.1 Local Church Congregations 183
7.7.2 Baptist Associations 188
7.7.3 Baptist Union and Colleges 192

7.7.4 International/Ecumenical and Mission 193
7.8 Conclusion 194

Conclusion and Indication of Further Research 195

Chapter 8 Conclusion 196

8.1 Experiences of Exclusion and Inclusion 196
8.2 Exploring the Barriers to Inclusion 197
8.3 Theological Reflection on Trinitarian Relationships 198
8.4 Response: Friendship as a Way of Fostering Participatory Inclusion 199
8.5 Fostering Friendships 200
8.6 Further Avenues of Research 201

Appendices 205

Appendix A – BUGB Disability Questionnaire 206

Appendix B – Analysis of BUGB Disability Questionnaire 208

Appendix C – Autobiography of Author 211

Appendix D – New Baptist Union Ministers' Settlement Process and Papers 221

Bibliography 238

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Abstract

This thesis argues that intentional, mutual and particular friendship can be a significant way of enabling the participatory inclusion of physically disabled people in Baptist church communities.

Starting with critical reflections on the experiences of the author and other disabled people, this thesis identifies experiences of exclusion and inclusion within Baptist church communities, other church traditions and society in general.

Three key factors that shape the understanding of disability and relationships between disabled and non-disabled people are explored. Firstly, language and metaphor relating to disability can create barriers to inclusion by emphasising differences between disabled and non-disabled people. Secondly, historic sociological understandings of disability, commonly referred to as the Individual/Medical Model of Disability, have led to the exclusion of disabled people from society and therefore churches. The development of Social Models of Disability in the late twentieth century addressed many of the issues, and significantly increased the inclusion of disabled people, but did not address the real impact of the embodiment of disabled people and the significance of interpersonal relationships. Thirdly, some aspects of historical theological understandings, which relate disability to sin or assume the requirement of physical healing, are identified. These have led to the dominance of a pastoral care approach towards disabled people that restricts participatory inclusion. A range of contemporary theological approaches to disability are surveyed. They address many of the assumptions that have led to exclusion. They do not, however, fully address the significance that relationships in general, and friendship in particular, can play in the inclusion of disabled people in Baptist church communities.

I draw on a 'relational' understanding of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, which focuses on two central concepts: 'persons *as* relation' and 'participation'. I use these concepts as a theological foundation for the development of covenant friendships within and beyond Baptist church communities. The first shifts the discussion about the personhood of disabled people away from individual characteristics, with the emphasis put on relationships between disabled and non-disabled people. The second brings disabled people into full participation within the church and world in covenant relationship with God.

Finally, this thesis proposes that engaging with the theological approaches to disability previously identified, intentional, mutual and particular friendships between disabled and non-disabled people can foster participatory inclusion. It shows that these can enrich the contemporary theological understandings of disability. Building on the Trinitarian theology of Paul Fiddes, which shapes a contemporary Baptist covenant ecclesiology, it concludes that such friendships are an appropriate way of understanding both covenant relationships and face-to-face relationships. This has the potential to effectively foster the participatory inclusion of disabled people in Baptist church communities.

Declaration

I declare that no portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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About the Author

Martin Hobgen gained a Bachelor of Science Degree in Mathematics and Computing at the University of Bath (1983–1988). Whilst working as an analyst programmer for an airline reservation system, he sensed a call to Baptist Ministry. He trained at Bristol Baptist College and gained a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Theological Studies (2:1) through the University of Bristol (1997–2000). He gained a Master of Arts Degree in Applied Theology through the University of Bristol (part-time, 2000–2005). His dissertation concerned three models of disability and how churches related to these understandings. From 2001-13 he served in Coventry as the minister of a local Baptist church. He has served as a trustee of the Heart of England Baptist Association, as a co-opted member of the Baptist Union Council and has been a member of the Baptist Union Disability Justice Group.

Chapter 1 Introduction

I was dramatically reminded, very soon after I got married, that I have a different physical perspective on the world compared with non-wheelchair users. My wife and I took one camera away on honeymoon and we both took photographs. Looking through the pictures soon afterwards, I realised that some were familiar while others were oddly unfamiliar. The familiar pictures were taken by me, showing the viewpoint from my wheelchair approximately 100cm from the ground; the unfamiliar ones were taken by my wife standing 65cm higher. Several years later, as I entered pastoral ministry, I bought an electric wheelchair with an elevating seat. I quickly discovered that not only did I see the world from a different physical point of view, but that some people related to me differently when I was 'standing' at roughly 160cm tall.

As a wheelchair user, I am very aware of my experience of the physical landscape, including both the natural and built environment. Any movement through a physical landscape is shaped by whether I am on my own or with other people. If I am travelling with others, then the different relationships I have with my companions further shape my experience of a journey. Journeys alone, with strangers, or with friends are experienced in quite different ways; hence a longer version of the title of this thesis would be: "When I am among friends, I am least disabled, when I am among strangers I am most disabled."

1.1 Landscape of Disability

This thesis explores the landscape of disability. It can be understood in terms of a reflection on a physical journey. It is also a spiritual journey, as I reflect on and explore my own journey of faith and that of others within the church community. Furthermore, it is an intellectual journey as I examine academic understandings of, and responses to, disability and the experiences of disabled people.

The landscape of disability is shaped by the way disability and disabled people are understood. The dominant factors shaping this landscape are the use of metaphorical language related to disability, and sociological and theological understandings of disability. These emerge in Chapter 2 and are explored in Chapters 3, 4 and 5, respectively. I briefly discuss the way the physical landscape affects disabled people in the next section of this chapter.

At the start of this chapter I described how my wife and I have different visual viewpoints of the world around us. We consequently have a different internal perspective on the landscape of disability. While our views of and about the world differ, they are overlapping because of the relationship that exists between us. Our shared experiences give each of us some insight into the perspective of the other.

In general terms there are two dominant perspectives on the metaphorical landscape of disability, those of disabled and non-disabled people. As with my wife and I, they are not discrete. The degree of overlap depends on relationships that exist between members of these two broad groups. It is important to recognise that neither of these groups is homogenous, and disabled people are themselves as diverse as non-disabled people.

It is common to identify two broad sub-groups within the group of those people labelled as 'disabled people': physically disabled and intellectually disabled.[1] The sociological and theological literature on disability is often focused on one or other of these two subgroups.[2] Such groupings often rely on a medical definition of disability. I suggest that between these sub-groups there will be enough commonality of experience to be able to find a broad perspective on the landscape of disability. This will be different to the perspective of non-disabled people.

If, however, disability is understood in terms of social attitudes rather than medical definitions, many disabled people share an experience of negative attitudes from non-disabled people, which shapes their own perspective on the landscape of disability.

In this thesis, where possible, I acknowledge the positionality of authors, whether they are disabled people or closely acquainted with disabled people. I do not want to suggest that only disabled people can write about disability, but it is important to recognise authors' context and viewpoints, as discussed in Chapter 5.

The differences in these perspectives, and the different understandings of disability and disabled people that result, shape the experience of disabled people in both the physical world and the social landscape of our relationships with others. These factors and

[1] (McLachlan, 2018, p. 37f) discusses the taxonomy of disability which makes such labelling complex and controversial.
[2] See Chapters 4 and 5.

perspectives influence whether disabled people are excluded or included in society and church communities.

1.2 Background of Thesis

This thesis has its origins in my own experiences of being a wheelchair user and an ordained minister within the Baptist Union of Great Britain.[3] Prior to entering theological college, I had limited awareness of the complex issues that have shaped the experiences of disabled people.

My interest in disability was triggered by reading Nancy Eiesland's *The Disabled God*,[4] which had been published only three years previously. This book is considered to be foundational in the emerging field of Disability Theology. After reading it, I began to explore issues related to disability. This started with my final year project on abortion and infanticide of disabled babies. It was followed by an M.A. dissertation on models of disability and the church, and has continued with ongoing reflection on aspects of ministry and church life from a disabled perspective. Most recently I explored physical disability and participatory inclusion by doing the research that has culminated in this thesis.[5]

Historically, the dominant understanding of disability has been from the mindset of non-disabled people. This means that disabled people have been excluded from society and churches in many ways, thus their voices have been excluded from the debates about disability.[6] Disabled people have either travelled alone or with non-disabled people controlling their journey through life. I propose that when disabled and non-disabled people journey together as friends, this fosters participatory inclusion of disabled people in both Baptist church communities and in society.

Churches have generally made great improvements to the physical aspects of access to their buildings in recent years. This has often been prompted by legislation such as the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and the Equality Act (2010). Where possible, steps have been

[3] I will refer to Baptist Union of Great Britain as the Baptist Union in this thesis unless quoting. The full name is used in references to publications of the Baptist Union with no named author. It is also referred to as BUGB or BU in some of the literature. The Baptist Union has recently been rebranded as 'Baptists Together'. For consistency with my sources I will refer to the Baptist Union.

[4] (Eiesland, 1994) which I read in 1997 when I started my theological training.

[5] One of the five core values set out by the Baptist Union in *Five Core Values for a Gospel People* is 'To be an inclusive people.' (Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1999)

[6] (Sharp, 2012) suggests a critical question that pastoral theology asks: 'who is missing from the table?'

removed or ramps installed, accessible toilets and hearing-loops provided, and many other physical alterations made: this has improved physical access to church buildings for both non-disabled and disabled people. While there is more that can be done to improve physical access to church buildings and other locations where churches meet, these issues have dominated the approach to enabling disabled people to become part of church life.[7]

Although the focus of many people within and beyond the church is on the buildings and church uses, the heart of church life is found among people and their relationships with God and with one another. This is of particular significance for Baptist churches. Throughout Baptist history we have understood the church as a group of people called together to worship God in a covenant relationship. This is worked out through serving God and others in the congregation, immediate locality, wider community, nation and world. We shall see that there are other aspects of the Baptist tradition from the early seventeenth century to the present day which can provide rich resources for the future.

In the light of this, I want to embark on a journey to discover how disability and disabled people have been, and are, misunderstood. I examine how this has shaped their experience of being excluded from full participation in the life of Baptist and other churches. I then propose that friendship can enable the shift towards inclusion to continue, with disabled and non-disabled people travelling together into a deeper relationship with God and one another. Using words from some early Baptist covenants, this will enable people, disabled and non-disabled alike, to "… walk together … watch over one another … in ways known and to be made known."[8]

1.3 Terminology used in this Thesis

The appropriate language to address issues of disability/ability is complex and there is no clear agreement or emerging consensus.[9] Different terminology is preferred in different contexts and by different authors. I want briefly to outline issues of language used to describe, firstly, 'the able-bodied', and secondly, 'the disabled'. I then discuss the relationship between this terminology and how we understand disability and the relationship between disabled and non-disabled people.

[7] The need to move beyond physical access is emphasised by, for instance, (McLachlan, 2018, pp. 59-63).
[8] (Fiddes, 2003, pp. 21-22)
[9] (Barnes, 1995; Blaska, 1993; Devlieger, 1999, pp. 137-152; Fernald, 1995; Foreman, 2005; Marks, 1999)

Although the term 'able-bodied' is commonly used throughout the literature, it is not a term with which I am comfortable. Some authors use the term 'temporarily able-bodied' on the basis that everyone will eventually experience some degree of disability as they age.[10] The term 'person without disabilities' is sometimes used.[11] I will use the term 'non-disabled' because this brings a common element through the use of 'disabled' in the descriptions of both the two groups. 'Able-bodied' is used on a few occasions for emphasis.

My preferred terminology is to use 'disabled person/people' to include both physical and learning disabilities, so that, where possible and appropriate, all are included within the discussion.[12] The use of 'disabled people' has been described as 'disability neutral language' by Jennie Weiss Block, as it covers the diversity of people within the group.[13] Many authors, particularly but not exclusively in the USA, argue for 'people first language' and therefore refer to 'people with …' physical or learning disabilities.[14] I am, however, slightly uncomfortable with the implication that a person 'possesses' a disability. For me, this is at odds with an understanding of disability as a social construct, as distinct from a person having a physical or learning impairment. I use people first language when referring to particular groups of disabled people. Other terms are used in quotations.

The focus of this thesis is the 'participatory inclusion' of 'physically disabled people', also referred to as 'people with physical disabilities', within Baptist church communities. Through participatory inclusion, I am seeking more than inclusion by being present in church communities yet remaining passive. Physically disabled people should be able to actively participate in all areas of church community life.[15]

Terminology in common usage today shapes society's understanding of disability in individual and medical ways. Although some historic terms have largely been dropped from common use, there are echoes of these understandings still present in the terminology. Our contemporary perspective sees disability as a social construct, and there have been some

[10] For instance (Eiesland, 1994, pp. 24, 107-116, 121).
[11] (Llewellyn Ihssen, 2020, p. 10)
[12] 'People with learning disabilities' are also referred to as 'people with intellectual disabilities' or 'mentally disabled people'.
[13] (Block, 2002, pp. 27-31)
[14] (McLachlan, 2018, p. 21) For instance McLachlan prefers 'people first' language: 'people with disabilities' in contrast to my preference of 'disabled people'.
[15] For a discussion of 'inclusion' versus 'integration' see (Booth, 1996; Culham & Nind, 2003; Rodriguez & Garro-Gil, 2015).

attempts to find language that reflects this. It has proved difficult, however, to find terminology that is not related to individuals and not cumbersome to use.

One inescapable and unfortunate effect of identifying any group of people is that a duality is set up between those who are within and those outside the group. This further creates the impression that there is a clear-cut boundary to such groups, which, for disabled people, is not the case. Within the Individual/Medical Model of Disability there are some clearly identified groups.[16] In my case, the model assigns me the label 'physically disabled person' because I have a medical condition, spina bifida, which means that I use a wheelchair at all times. Under the Social Model of Disability, I am labelled a 'disabled person' if I experience discrimination from non-disabled people and society as a result of attitudes towards my use of a wheelchair.[17] There are some contexts in which I am therefore more or less disabled.

Attempts to classify disabled people into neat categories have been attempted, but these are problematic.[18] Within what might appear to be a clearly defined group, such as physically disabled people, there are other issues which may differentiate outwardly similar people. I have become increasingly aware of the differences between those such as myself who have a congenital disability, and those who have become disabled through illness, accident or old age.[19] This is particularly noticeable if outwardly we appear alike, such as both being wheelchair users.

The challenge of categorising disability means that to refer to '*the* disabled' is not only depersonalising in a way that tends to exclude, but it is meaningless given the sheer diversity of disabled people. A more appropriate generalisation is 'disabled people'. In order to speak about the relationships between disabled and non-disabled people, language needs to be used carefully.

Although terminology such as 'handicap', 'cripple', and 'dumb' is generally to be avoided as negative and excluding language, these terms are found in the literature, particularly when disability and disabled people are referred to in passing. Some writers in the USA have used

[16] Described on page 65.
[17] Described on page 72.
[18] (McLachlan, 2018, pp. 37-38)
[19] The experience of becoming blind, described by Hull, is in marked contrast to the experience of a personal friend who has been blind since birth (Hull, 1990; 2013, pp. 62-64).

'handicap' until recently. Where I am quoting from sources, I shall retain the language used in the original.[20]

The term 'impairment' is widely used in contemporary literature concerning disability and disabled people. While it might seem to be a negative and inappropriate term, it is used consistently in the Social Model of Disability to refer to a person's medical condition.[21] Although I am somewhat uncomfortable with the term, on account of its negative connotations, I shall use it in this way when necessary.[22]

1.4 Methodology and Outline of Chapters

The methodology used in this thesis is usually referred to as the 'pastoral cycle', which was popularised in the UK by Laurie Green in his book *Let's do Theology*.[23] Green shows that this process leads to transformation and is therefore a progression which is better described as an ongoing spiral rather than a static cycle.[24] Maria Cimperman, in her book *Social Analysis for the 21st Century*,[25] helpfully emphasises the progressive nature of the 'pastoral spiral'.[26]

With strong links to liberation theology's concern for people who are marginalised, oppressed and excluded, the pastoral cycle provides a powerful methodological approach to fostering the participatory inclusion of physically disabled people in Baptist church communities.

These underpinning principles relate to Jesus's declaration in Luke 4, quoting Isaiah 61, expressing his concern for marginalised people. This was a foundational characteristic of my own calling to ordained Baptist ministry.

> When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll

[20] This language is found in older sources, approximately pre-1980. Some disabled people are reclaiming terms which have been considered demeaning. In this way a disabled person may call themselves a cripple while objecting to being described in this way by a non-disabled person. For instance Stella Young calls herself a 'crip', quoted in (Clifton, 2018, p. 9).
[21] 'Impairment' may be referred to as 'physiological phenomena', 'disability' as 'social phenomena' which, in my opinion, is a little cumbersome. (Moss, 2017, p. 276).
[22] Although among disabled people it is widely accepted that 'impairment' refers to bodily or mental aspects of a disabled person, to the general public this term has negative connotations in some contexts (Marks, 1999, pp. 138-139).
[23] (L. Green, 2000) Laurie Green is a non-disabled retired Anglican Bishop. His book focuses on enabling members of a parish to become involved in doing theology in their own context.
[24] (L. Green, 2000, p. 30)
[25] (Cimperman, 2015)
[26] (Cimperman, 2015, p. 86)

> of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:
> 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
> because he has anointed me
> to bring good news to the poor.
> He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives
> and recovery of sight to the blind,
> to let the oppressed go free,
> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'
> And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.'[27]

The pastoral cycle is a four-stage process: experience, exploration, reflection and response.[28] There are a number of variations, such as an explicit identification of a "*kairos* moment"[29] and/or the addition of a secondary cycle.[30] The structure of this thesis follows these four stages and the chapter outline is set out alongside a discussion of each stage. This chapter precedes the four stages by setting out an introduction to the thesis, the terminology used, a discussion of methodology and the thesis outline.

The aim of the pastoral cycle is to bring transformation to a situation (i.e. the exclusion of disabled people) by paying close attention to experience.[31] This is emphasised by Cimperman, writing from a Roman Catholic context, exploring the biblical theme of transformation and its place in the Roman Catholic social tradition.[32] Green sets out a number of theological themes that are key to achieve transformation and are particularly relevant to this thesis. Reflecting on the connections with Latin American liberation theology, Green emphasises that theology broadens our concept of salvation to include liberation of both individuals and communities.[33] Our personal freedom is reflected in seeking to bring freedom, in the widest sense, to other people. Green suggests: "God is

[27] Luke 4:16-21 (*New Revised Standard Version*)
[28] (Ballard & Pritchard, 2006, pp. 81-95; Graham, Graham, Walton, & Ward, 2005, pp. 188-191; L. Green, 2000, pp. 25-30; Thompson, Pattison, & Thompson, 2008, pp. 21-22, 56-61) In each of these the four stages have slightly different names but are identifiable as the four terms I am using.
[29] (Thompson et al., 2008, pp. 56, 97-111) Referring to the unpublished work of Andrew Todd (in 2008) where this is described as the 'moment of insight enabling the movement from reflection to action.' (Thompson et al., p. 57)
[30] (L. Green, 2000, pp. 91-96; Thompson et al., 2008, pp. 58-59) where an 'intuitive leap' in the reflection stage is itself the focus of a loop round the pastoral cycle. Green gives the example of checking the group's interpretation of a biblical narrative with the Christian tradition of interpreting that narrative.
[31] (L. Green, 2000, pp. 14-22)
[32] (Cimperman, 2015, pp. 26-56)
[33] The connections to liberation theology are outlined in (Graham et al., 2005, pp. 188-191; Ramsay, 2012).

concerned to save not only individual persons, but to put right the very structure of creation, life and its relationships."[34] While the focus of this thesis is the participatory inclusion of disabled people in Baptist church communities, this is part of a much wider application: to enable disabled people to fully respond to God's invitation of participation in covenant relationship with all creation.[35]

Close attention must be paid to the context in which theology is practised. Although the broader setting of this thesis is the Christian church, the specific context is Baptist church communities in the UK and the distinct characteristics of this community.[36] Green also places an emphasis on "… the place of action in theology…".[37] This is reflected in the last stage of my thesis, suggesting ways in which Baptist churches may act to foster friendships between disabled and non-disabled people in order to enable participatory inclusion.

Another key theme for Green is identifying issues of power. He writes: "… when Jesus specifies in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5.3-12) that it is the powerless who are blessed by God, he confounds our prejudices about the nature of power."[38] The imbalance of power between disabled and non-disabled people is a recurrent theme in this thesis. The continuing tendency for non-disabled people to exert power over disabled people will be shown to have deep-seated roots in historical understandings of disability. The concern about misuse of power connects with God's concern for the oppressed, which is often expressed as God's 'bias to the poor'.[39] This thesis seeks to find ways to address the experience of such exclusion through the formation of friendships within the church. The way churches seek to enable participatory inclusion of disabled people (and others who are marginalised by society) forms an important witness which may influence society and challenge injustice.[40] There is evidence that disabled people in the UK are more likely to experience poverty and oppression.[41]

[34] (L. Green, 2000, p. 14)
[35] See Chapter 6.
[36] (L. Green, 2000, pp. 16-18)
[37] (L. Green, 2000, p. 18)
[38] (L. Green, 2000, p. 20)
[39] (L. Green, 2000, p. 20) referring to the work of Bishop David Sheppard and that of Leonardo and Clodovis Boff.
[40] (L. Green, 2000, pp. 21-22)
[41] (Ryan, 2019) devotes a chapter each to Poverty, Work, Independence, Housing, Women and children. She examines how disabled people experience injustice with in each of these themes.

My overall aim for this thesis is transformation: to suggest ways to transform experiences of exclusion so that disabled people can experience participatory inclusion within Baptist church communities, the wider church and the world in which we all live.

The first stage of the pastoral cycle is a critical look at experience.[42] Although Green sets out how this stage might be carried out by a group within a local church, I have chosen to follow Cimperman, starting with the experience of the researcher and the researcher's context.[43] I have made this decision because it resonates powerfully with my motivation for addressing the issue of exclusion of disabled people from participation.

Using this approach, in Part 1 (Chapter 2), I start by critically examining my own experience of exclusion and inclusion, within a range of church contexts and in wider society, prior to and during my experience of being part of faith communities. I draw on a range of sources, from church and secular contexts, to show the elements of continuity and discontinuity between my experience and that of other disabled people. One of my suggestions for further research will be to conduct participatory research among disabled people in Baptist church communities as the initial step in a second pass around the pastoral cycle.[44]

The second stage of the pastoral cycle explores significant issues that emerge from the first stage. This draws on a wide range of tools and sources.[45] Green suggests that there are three elements which help make sense of this exploration: looking for connections, values, and causes.[46]

Since the late 1990s, the interdisciplinary field of disability studies has emerged, providing ways of exploring these three elements. This interdisciplinary field reveals that it is an extraordinarily complex task to understand the nature of disability. There is also a need to identify and handle differences of perspective, both here and in the following stage.[47]

In recent years, an ever-growing number of sociological models of disability has been proposed, each with their own emphasis and perspective. As the field of Disability Theology

[42] (L. Green, 2000, pp. 42-56)
[43] (Cimperman, 2015, pp. 57-75; L. Green, 2000, p. 45)
[44] (L. Green, 2000, p. 6)
[45] (Cimperman, 2015, p. 77f; L. Green, 2000, p. 57f) both explore the range of resources that can be bought to bear on this exploration.
[46] (L. Green, 2000, pp. 70-72)
[47] (Cimperman, 2015, pp. 120-121)

has developed, a number of significantly different approaches to understanding disability have emerged. Some approaches start from the experiences and contexts of disabled people, which may be described as 'doing theology from below'.[48] Others start from our understanding of God as one who embraces and includes all, disabled and non-disabled people, which is often described as 'doing theology from above'.[49]

In this thesis the second stage of the pastoral cycle, Part 2, (Chapters 3-5), explores the way in which metaphorical language, sociological models, and theological approaches respectively shape our contemporary understandings of disability. These understandings in turn shape the relationships between disabled and non-disabled people. Green suggests that religious factors should be considered at this stage.[50] Cimperman suggests that:

> Religious analysis … looks at religious structures that organise our understanding of God, humanity and creation and offers a faith- and value-based way of looking at the world.[51]

I therefore include a survey of theological approaches to disability in this second stage, since they significantly influence the way in which church communities understand disability and relate to disabled people.[52]

The third stage of the pastoral cycle is a theological reflection on the understanding of issues that came to the fore in the previous stage.[53] This includes reflection on biblical sources and various church traditions, as well as wider theological sources that address the issues under consideration.[54]

In this thesis the third stage of the pastoral cycle, Part 3 (Chapter 6), focuses on the issue of transforming experiences: from exclusion to participatory inclusion, through relationships grounded in a Christian understanding of God as Trinity. Central to this are aspects of Paul Fiddes's perspective on the 'relational' nature of God's trinitarian life, and of our

[48] (Ballard & Pritchard, 2006, p. 89) this approach can also be referred to as 'bottom up theology'.
[49] (Reinders, 2008) for instance, clearly differentiates his approach from that of Eiesland and Block, which he describes as 'theologies of disability' (p. 159). His approach is a theology of being human, in the light of who God reveals Godself to be (p. 227ff). This might also be described as 'top down theology'.
[50] (L. Green, 2000, p. 65)
[51] (Cimperman, 2015, p. 114)
[52] (Cimperman, 2015, pp. 113-114)
[53] (L. Green, 2000, pp. 74-98)
[54] (Thompson et al., 2008, pp. 153-173) discusses the various forms this analysis can take.

participation in God's engagement with creation. The implications of this are examined in the context of Baptist understandings of covenant relationships and ecclesiology.

The fourth and final stage of the pastoral cycle is response. Here a proposal is made to help to transform the kind of problematic experience that was the focus of the first stage.[55] Although this is the last stage of this pastoral cycle, the process can be repeated. This thesis forms a first pass around the four stages of the pastoral cycle.

In this thesis the fourth stage, Part 4 (Chapter 7), sets out my response. This identifies the importance of friendship between disabled and non-disabled people as a way of fostering participatory inclusion in Baptist church communities. I propose that such friendships are best characterised in the terms of intentionality, mutuality and particularity. I offer this as an appropriate way of describing covenant relationships within Baptist church communities.

Finally, Chapter 8 provides the conclusion of the thesis and an indication of potential avenues for future research. It sets out how further transformation towards participatory inclusion for disabled people might be achieved, not least inviting another pass around the stages of the pastoral cycle, enabling the progression along a pastoral spiral.

[55] (Ballard & Pritchard, 2006, p. 86; Cimperman, 2015, pp. 147-168; Graham et al., 2005, pp. 88-91; L. Green, 2000, pp. 99-114)

Part 1 The Experience of Exclusion and Inclusion

Chapter 2 The View from Where I Sit

2.1 Introduction

In this first part of the pastoral cycle, I reflect on my experiences of exclusion and inclusion, drawing on the brief autobiography in appendix C. I bring this into conversation with a number of surveys and reports from Christian and secular sources. My research makes it clear that my personal experience is different from the experiences of many other disabled people. I conclude that, as a wheelchair user, the development of relationships between myself and non-disabled people has fostered participatory inclusion in Baptist church communities and beyond. The most significant form of relationship has been the friendships that I have had with non-disabled people.

2.2 Critical Reflection on my Experiences of Exclusion and Inclusion

There are, I believe, several factors which have significantly shaped my own experiences of exclusion and inclusion. The most significant factors are the physical environment, the language regarding disability and disabled people, the understanding of disability by non-disabled people, and the wide range of theological understandings of disability.

2.2.1 The Changing Physical Environment

The physical environment has had a significant impact on my experiences. Until the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) there was little legislation requiring physical access to private and public buildings. I was fortunate that my local village primary school was reasonably accessible, despite including some Victorian buildings. The school was on one level and ramps were easily fitted to the few steps. A significant extension was added in the early 1970s and this was fully accessible. The only area that was physically inaccessible was the swimming pool and throughout my schooling I was effectively excluded from any PE or sporting activity. My parents' house was reasonably accessible, although a through-the-floor hoist had to be fitted once I could no longer crawl up the stairs.

Access to shops, leisure facilities, museums and other public facilities was extremely variable. To a certain extent this was overcome when I was young by my parents being able to carry me and the wheelchair up short flights of steps.

Physical access to secondary school buildings was a major factor in my family's decision to move house in 1975. In order for me to remain in mainstream education my parents had to

find an accessible school. We moved from a house to a bungalow, which significantly improved access. Substantial building work was carried out to extend the bungalow, for which there were grants available from the local council.[56]

Physical access was once more an issue when I was applying for university courses for entry in 1983. I considered applying to Oxford University to study mathematics. Although one of the colleges, St Catherine's, was considered accessible on account of its relatively modern buildings, the course was taught in various inaccessible locations throughout Oxford. Although there were some colleges and universities that were potentially accessible, I settled on Bath University because of the compact campus, which was largely, although not entirely, accessible.[57] Once I had completed my degree, I found physical access was still an issue when considering where to study for my PGCE teaching qualification, not only concerning access to the colleges, but also to the schools that formed a critical element of the course. Physical access remained an issue when applying for teaching posts, and I found it essential to visit a school before applying for a position.

While searching for employment other than teaching, the physical environment was a real issue that either excluded me from applying to certain companies or was perceived as an issue once I had applied. The computing company where I worked from 1990 until 1997 was located in new buildings on the outskirts of Swindon and did not present any physical access difficulties. The company was more focused on my computing skills than on my use of a wheelchair. We were also able to purchase a bungalow locally which needed very minor adaptations.

The physical environment was also an issue when applying to Baptist colleges for ministerial training.[58] It continued to be a factor during the subsequent search for a church in which to settle as pastor. I considered applying to three of the Baptist colleges and ended up applying to Bristol. Although there were physical access issues they were less significant, than

[56] Anecdotal information from my parents.
[57] It was close to my parents' home in case I needed to return home when the personal care support failed to work properly. See Appendix C on page 213.
[58] For information on the Baptist colleges see https://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/332828/Training_Overview.aspx Accessed 19/02/2020.

Regent's Park College in Oxford.[59] Although access to Spurgeon's College in London would have been possible, the provision of suitable accommodation presented a significant problem. We were able to purchase a house in Bristol which needed some modifications, including fitting a stairlift, to provide access. During my time at college, the difficulties of physical aspects of the buildings were largely overcome due to the support of friends, colleagues and staff, to which I return below. Their assistance around the college and their knowledge of access to churches where I needed to preach was invaluable. This enabled me to preach in churches where it was known in advance that physical access was possible. Unlike most of the students, I did not preach in churches in the valleys of south Wales, as they were often built on the steep slopes of the valley sides and accessed via a flight of steps.

During the 1990s the issue of physical access to the wider environment was significantly shaped, although not solved, by the Disability Discrimination Act (1995). Flat access rather than steps became more common. There was better provision of accessible toilets, and there was a slow but steady change in attitudes towards the inclusion of disabled people through the removal of physical barriers.

My experience of physical access to churches has been much more varied. The focus for most churches remains limited to physical provision, although this can be very minimal if there are no disabled people present in a church congregation. The cost of making significant changes can also present a problem to churches.

From my experience there is still an implicit, and sometimes explicit, assumption that disabled people will be passive members of the congregation. This means that raised platforms, from which services are often led, remain largely inaccessible, even in new church buildings. The architect working on the new building for the church where I am currently a member said that they would provide access to a raised platform area 'if asked by the church'. The problem with this approach is that until churches recognise that disabled people can actively participate in leading services, they are unlikely to ask for access to be made. I believe that ramped access to a low platform was only incorporated in the early

[59] See Appendix C on on page 216. (Llewellyn Ihssen, 2020) explores the unintentional barriers that exist within theological education which may exclude disabled students. He argues that while there are positive opportunities for discussing embodiment and inclusion, barriers to the inclusion of disabled people remain.

design phase of our building because I already preached, led services and was a member of the church building committee. The same architects have been involved in a multi-million-pound development for a church of which I was a member nearly 30 years ago, where I am still known by some congregation members and it is known that I am ordained, and yet no access was made to a multi-step raised platform. There have been times when I have effectively been excluded from receiving communion because of the expectation of receiving the elements at an inaccessible altar rail. In the case of one cathedral, an entire communion service was inaccessible by being held in the quire, which was up a flight of uneven stone steps. At other times I have had to preach, read from the Bible or lead prayers from the same level as the congregation.

The physical environment is most challenging when I am on my own. When I am among strangers, I am not able to rely on predictable and relevant assistance. This arises due to assumptions made by others about what I can and cannot manage or achieve. When I am with friends, the barriers created by the physical environment are not completely removed, but are reduced.

2.2.2 The Changing Nature of Language About Disability

The nature of the language that is used to describe both disability and disabled people has changed dramatically since I was born in the mid-1960s. I clearly remember occasions from my childhood when I was referred to as 'handicapped' or 'crippled'. It was not uncommon to be referred to in the third person, sometimes with an explicit assumption that I had a learning disability as well. For example, a child's understandable question, 'What's wrong with him, Mummy?' was answered by responses ranging from 'He can't walk' to 'There's something wrong with his head that stops him walking.'

I do not remember such language and assumptions being expressed, other than as insults from peers at school, later than the early 1980s. This might have been because people felt uncomfortable talking about an older teenager or young adult in such terms, or because attitudes to disabled people had begun to change. I was also gaining the confidence to challenge such language. The tendency to speak about me, often addressing my

companions, has persisted, however, and I occasionally still experience this.[60] My friends know to remain silent at this point and let me answer the person directly. To my surprise this has sometimes led to 'circular conversations': my response to the person addressing me through my companion is responded to by them talking to my companion again. One telling example of this was when my wife and I were on our honeymoon. When parking at a National Trust property, in a well-positioned marked disabled parking bay, a member of staff offered to assist my wife. From the tone of the conversation and the use of third person language about me he assumed that she was my carer. He did a double take when he noticed my wedding ring and abruptly directed his conversation to me in the first person.

Fortunately, the use of terms like 'handicapped' and 'cripple' have largely disappeared from use, although I notice that the former is still used by some older people and persists in the press and media. It has been replaced by some people with the catch-all phrase 'the disabled', which is meaningless considering the diversity among disabled people. With the rise of what has been called 'politically correct' speech, and the lack of agreement on terminology regarding disability, some people are clearly left not knowing how to refer to my use of a wheelchair.

I have found that the existence, or lack, of relationships with other people shapes the language that is used. While strangers may still use language that is offensive, marking me out as different or revealing negative assumptions about me, I find that friends tend to ask me what language they should use. Most of the time the use of language is not an issue with friends, as the relationship means that my use of a wheelchair is not the focus of attention.

The use of language that reveals attitudes and assumptions about disabled people can still be problematic, for instance the use of negative metaphors of blindness and deafness to indicate lack of understanding.[61] The implications of the metaphorical use of language concerning disability is examined further in Chapter 3.

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[60] I'm using 'companion', rather than carer, to refer to anyone ranging from my wife, close family, friends, acquaintances or those who are with me in a professional capacity, either in ministry settings or when providing assistance with travelling by train, for instance. This challenges any assumptions that I am dependent on those who accompany me.

[61] I use 'deafness' here rather than 'Deafness' as I am referring to metaphorical language rather than cultural Deafness or Deaf/deafened people. (Lewis, 2007, pp. 1-4) Lewis uses 'Deaf' to refer to people describe themselves in this way, 'deaf' to refer to people and situations that refer to hearing loss, and 'd/Deaf' when it is unclear or she is referring to all d/Deaf people.

2.2.3 The Changing Sociological Understanding of Disability

Historically, disability and therefore disabled people have been understood in terms of their individual medical condition. There are times when this is completely appropriate. My experience, however, indicates that when this perspective is used beyond the sphere of medicine and related fields (such as physiotherapy and occupational therapy) then it can erect significant barriers.

My disability, understood specifically in terms of my medical condition, was unknown in advance of my birth. It was, then, entirely appropriate that I should receive a medical diagnosis and treatment by a variety of medical specialists. Immediate transfer from the small hospital in Hatfield where I was born to the major teaching hospital, St Bartholomew's in central London, was critical to my immediate survival. It also enabled a reduction of the impact of the direct impairment caused by an open lesion on my spine due to spina bifida, and ongoing treatment for related medical issues. I continue to see a consultant urologist to keep a careful watch on my kidneys. Advances in urological treatment of patients with spina bifida, from which I have benefited, means that we no longer die in our twenties or thirties due to renal failure. I am reassured by my consultant that I have a normal life expectancy regarding my kidney function, despite the historic risk affecting insurance and pension provision.[62] When I was younger, I was also regularly seeing an orthopaedic consultant regarding scoliosis of my spine.[63] As I have reached middle-age, I am aware that I may once again need to consider orthopaedic investigation, as my arms and shoulders are affected by the effort of manually propelling a wheelchair. Understanding disability in terms of medical diagnosis has been and will continue to be relevant, as long as it is within the sphere of the medical treatment of direct and indirect implications of a medical diagnosis.

There are, however, two aspects of a medical understanding of disability that are unhelpful. Firstly, there can be an inappropriate focus on fixing a person's body when it is perceived to be broken. The aim of such an approach is to enable someone to function 'normally' so that they fit with the expectations and functioning of non-disabled society. My experience of the

[62] The actuarial data used for insurance and pension purposes is still affected by the history of early deaths. It is prohibitively expensive for me to obtain life insurance and some forms of holiday insurance. My minister's pension will not pay out for early retirement on grounds of ill health if this is related in any way to kidney function or disease. For an examination of life-expectancy of people with spina bifida see (Hunt & Reid, 2009).
[63] This is where the spine is deformed into an S-shape rather than remaining straight. I have also begun to experience a twisting of my spine.

expectation that I should be enabled to walk is an example of this attitude, as noted in Appendix C. There was an overwhelming assumption that it was necessary for me to be able to walk in order actively to participate in society. The reality was that the time and effort involved would have impacted my education, and the outcome would have provided a significantly lower level of mobility than was achievable through the use of an appropriate wheelchair.

Secondly, a medical understanding leads to the widely held assumption that my medical condition is the source of all aspects of exclusion or inclusion. I have frequently come across people who express surprise, or even disbelief, that 'a wheelchair user' attended mainstream school and university, is married, had a career in computing and, in particular, is an ordained minister. The frequently cited reason for their surprise is 'but you're in a wheelchair!' When seeking employment in a secular context I reached a point where I would no longer disclose my use of a wheelchair, until clarifying access to an interview once this has been offered in writing. To refuse me an interview in such circumstances would be in breach of the Equality Act (2010) and/or the Disability Discrimination Act (1995) prior to this. The situation regarding seeking a church in which I could work as a minister is more complex and this will be explored later.

The way the concept of disability is understood, and the subsequent ways in which non-disabled people relate to disabled people, has changed significantly in my lifetime. There has been a growing recognition of the need to address physical barriers to enable the inclusion of disabled people. Alongside this, there has been a growing awareness of the significant impact of the attitude of non-disabled society towards disabled people. My experience of this change has been mixed. There are times when people understand my disability purely in terms of my use of a wheelchair; at other times this is insignificant. Most of the time, however, I experience a mixture of both: my use of a wheelchair is a reality that is silently acknowledged, while people's attitudes towards me clearly indicate that they relate to me as a minister, a friend, a colleague or as a companion on the journey through life.

The change in attitude towards myself and other disabled people can be understood from a sociological perspective. The paradigm shift from an individual/medical to social understanding is explored in more detail in Chapter 4.

2.2.4 The Changing Theological Understanding of Disability

I was not brought up attending church so I do not have any personal experience of the theological understandings of disability, from my childhood and teenage years, on which I can directly reflect. I attended church very rarely, usually for a parade service because my sisters were members of Brownies and Guides connected to the parish church. My limited experience was of little provision being made for my use of a wheelchair. The pews in the church meant that I either had to sit in a side aisle, where I could not see or hear, or sit in the nave, where I created an obstacle for the procession of the choir and minister at the beginning and end of the service. Despite this lack of contact with church or any organised religion, I always believed that there was something divine that other people described as God. I remember that when my older sister died in January 1980, I was angry with God for existing rather than for allowing or causing her death in difficult circumstances.

My interest in religious matters began around the time of the visit of Pope John Paul II in May and June 1982, when I was studying for my A-levels. Previously, my awareness of gatherings of large numbers of people had been limited to reports of violent football crowds or rioting in St Paul's, Bristol, Brixton and Toxteth in the early 1980s. I was intrigued by the huge gathering at Coventry airport, celebrating Mass with a complete absence of any hostility or trouble.

I became good friends with some Christians during my first year at University in Bath. Several were fellow students on the same Maths course. In late 1984, aged 19, I made a commitment to the Christian faith and to making Jesus Christ a central focus in my life. I quickly became aware of a wide range of theological understandings of disability, which shaped the variety of relationships between the church, non-disabled and disabled people. Both the university's Christian Union and the low Anglican church in which I quickly became involved were influenced by the charismatic movement that had begun in the 1960s. There was an explicit acknowledgement of charismatic gifts, such as tongues, prophecy and physical healing. While being warmly welcomed and accepted as part of both faith communities, there was the constant awareness of the possibility of dramatic physical healing. I was not only welcomed as part of both communities but quickly became active: as a musician, a small group leader within the Christian Union, and a member of a prayer ministry team at church. For most of this period, I experienced significant levels of

participatory inclusion. It was only when the potential for physical healing became an expectation that I would be able to get out of my wheelchair and walk that I began to experience tension in my relationships with others and with God. The minister of the church at the time showed great wisdom and pastoral concern. He discussed with me the reality that I was able to fully contribute to the life of the church, whether or not I was healed and walking or remained as a wheelchair user.

I became aware that there were more troubling, and excluding, understandings of disability through contact with some members of the Christian Union, occasional visits to other churches, and by beginning to read non-academic theological books.[64] This showed that a significant number of Christians made a link between my disability and the perception that I or my parents, or even ancestors, had sinned and remained unforgiven. I read, and was told on several occasions, that God could not and would not use me unless my sins were forgiven, and I was subsequently physically healed. Due to the sense of exclusion that this provoked, I have distanced myself from churches and individuals who understand disability in these terms. I am still approached by people who want to pray for my physical healing, sometimes without asking permission first.

When I read Psalm 139 for the first time, during 1985–6, I experienced a powerful sense of acceptance and inclusion. I realised that God was intentionally including me within the church community without requiring my physical healing. The realisation that God in some way knew me from when I was in my mother's womb, and that I was "… fearfully and wonderfully made …",[65] enabled me to remain within charismatic churches, while distancing myself from some problematic theological understandings that tended to exclude me from participation. A range of theological understandings of disability are explored in Chapter 5.

2.2.5 Interconnections

Although I have considered four perspectives of my experience, the reality is that these and other factors form a complex dynamic which can work to exclude or include disabled people, and can be contradictory. This can be illustrated by the following example.

[64] For instance (Urquhart, 1986)
[65] Ps 139:14 (NRSV)

Soon after getting married, Ruth and I moved from our first home, a rented, fully adapted flat north of Bristol, to our own home in Swindon. We initially attended a local Anglican church where Ruth's father had been a curate in the early 1970s. The church was physically accessible and did not subscribe to a theological position that excluded me. On the third or fourth Sunday the vicar knelt to speak to me, at my level, after a service. He indicated that there was another wheelchair user who sometimes attended, both positive and inclusive factors. The vicar then adopted a rather patronising tone of voice and asked me what I did, expressing surprise that I worked as a computer programmer in a local company that was known to pay well. He then asked me how I got to work and once again expressed surprise when I explained that I drove. We left the church that day and did not attend it again while we lived in Swindon. The next church we visited, a Baptist church close to our house, welcomed us, and we both became actively involved. They became the church that sent me to train for Baptist ministry a few years later. There was a consistency between the improved physical access through a major building project, the language that was used concerning disability and in relation to me, and a theological understanding that accepted that God could, and would, use me as a wheelchair user. This fostered a relational understanding of disability that valued me as a person and used the gifts I could contribute to the church. They also fully supported my wife and me in difficult personal times.

The dominant focus of many churches is one of physical access through providing ramped access, disabled accessible toilets, and hearing loops. Therefore, this area will not form a substantial focus of my thesis. I shall focus on exploring issues of language, sociology and theology in the following chapters.

2.3 Placing my Experience in Wider Context

I now want to briefly reflect on my broader church experiences: the local church community, involvement with the local Baptist Association, participation in the Baptist Union Disability Justice Group, membership of the Baptist Union Council, and attendance at the annual Baptist Union Assembly. I set this alongside the reported experiences of other disabled people. This section concludes with a discussion of experiences within wider society.

2.3.1 British Baptist Context

As noted in Appendix C, my experience of local pastorate was one of inclusion and acceptance.[66] There was only one context in which my use of a wheelchair seemed to be problematic.

While I was in pastoral ministry, I had my first significant contact with segregated education for disabled people. About 500 metres from the church, on the edge of the estate, was a unique tertiary college, Hereward College, which specialised in enabling physically disabled people to achieve their academic potential.[67] Most of the students had previously attended special rather than mainstream school and their academic potential had not been fulfilled. The college had considerable success and some students achieved A-level grades that enabled them to attend university. Despite early discussions about some form of chaplaincy relationship, my contact remained informal. Although it was not stated, I think that the leadership and members of staff were able to relate to disabled people as residents, clients, students and young adults, but did not seem to be able to relate to disabled professionals. Some students occasionally attended services and events at our church, while others attended a local Anglican church.

My engagement with the life of the local Baptist Association gave me two perspectives on the exclusion or inclusion of disabled people in Baptist church life: initially as a volunteer representative and organiser of the ministers' meeting for Coventry and Warwickshire, and subsequently as a formally appointed trustee of the local Association.[68] The only significant barrier to my inclusion within the first role was the lack of information concerning access to churches in the Association where meetings were held. A survey of the churches was carried out and information on provision of accessible toilets, a hearing loop and ramped or level access was gathered. Because the survey was completed by each church it became clear that the level of provision was not consistently assessed. This was particularly problematic concerning whether accessible toilets were considered to be suitable. As an example, I attended an all-day meeting at a church that claimed to have suitable facilities. I found, however, that I could not get my small, lightweight wheelchair into the toilet cubicle

[66] On page 217.
[67] "Hereward College is a national college for people with disabilities and additional needs based in Coventry. It offers learners a varied curriculum that focuses on skills for independent living and employment." https://www.hereward.ac.uk/about/ Accessed 28/05/2019
[68] Heart of England Baptist Association (HEBA).

described as accessible. I also noted that although ministerial colleagues told me that there were disabled people present in the local churches, they were not present and engaged with meetings and events arranged by the Association. Once I became a trustee, I discovered that disability issues were not being addressed in local churches or within the Association unless someone intentionally flagged up the issues. This contrasted with issues regarding women and BAME ministers. My experience as part of the local church, within the local Association and as a member of the Baptist Union Council, indicates that the local Association has the potential to influence the approach of the local church in significant ways, and this will be explored in Chapter 7.

From 2011, I was involved in the Baptist Union Disability Justice Group. The group ran a well-attended and well-received seminar at the Baptist Union Assembly in Blackpool in May 2013. A special edition of the Baptist Ministers' Journal focusing on disability was published in the autumn of 2014. Rev. Glen Graham and I also ran a series of sessions in some of the Baptist Colleges, exploring issues of disability with ministerial students. Gender and racial justice issues have been on the curriculum for some time, but there has not been a significant focus on disability until recently. Material concerning disability has been presented by non-disabled people, and the embodied presence of Glen and I, both disabled, ordained Baptist ministers, had a noticeable and transformative impact on all the students who attended. Disabled people talking about disability, from personal experience and theological reflection, has a more profound effect than non-disabled people talking about the same issues. This is reflected in the disability rights slogan of 'Nothing about us without us'.[69]

The most significant piece of work undertaken by the Disability Justice Group was a survey of all Baptist Union churches. This was carried out to help the Group ascertain the number of disabled people within church congregations and their participation in these communities. The survey was sent to churches in autumn 2013 and questionnaires were returned during 2014. A number of broad conclusions can be drawn from a brief analysis of the questionnaire, as shown in Appendix B and outlined here.

[69] (Block, 2002, p. 142; Jacobs, 2019, p. 16) point to James Charlton's 1998 book, *Nothing about us without us,* as the source of this phrase, which he suggests originated in the Disability Rights Movement in the 1980s and early 1990s. It echoes the early arguments about disabled people's involvement in disability groups in the early 1970s. (Barnes & Mercer, 1997) provides an outline of this debate.

- The survey indicates that disabled people form 4–5% of formal members of Baptist churches.[70] Disabled people form 6–7% of regular attendees. Disabled children form only 1–2%. This suggests that disabled people are under-represented compared with the general population.[71]
- Less than 1% of church leaders are disabled people. Only 1–2% of other people with specific responsibilities within churches are disabled people. Few churches provide opportunities to improve members' awareness of disabled people.
- Regarding the provision of special events, 13–14% provide events for disabled people, some for those with physical disabilities and some for those with learning disabilities. A slightly higher proportion (18–19%) work with agencies to support disabled people. A fifth of churches (20–21%) provide some support to disabled people and 'carers' in their own homes.[72]
- A more encouraging picture emerges when looking at physical access to church buildings. Two thirds (66–67%) of churches are fully accessible for wheelchair users, while a third (31–32%) are partially accessible, leaving a small proportion (1–2%) not accessible. Induction loops are provided by 77–78%, however only 2–3% provide any Braille signage. The questionnaire did not specifically ask about the provision of accessible toilets.
- The rest of the questionnaire asked a range of questions about participation of disabled people in the life of the church and the church's engagement with disabled people. In the majority of churches, few disabled people are involved on a frequent (2–3%) or regular (6–7%) basis. Disabled people were occasionally (16–17%) or rarely (25–26%) involved. Of great concern was the fact that 50% of churches never involve disabled people in their activities, nor provide the means to foster greater involvement. This last figure may indicate churches where no disabled people

[70] Where percentages are given this is calculated from those who answered the relevant questions.
[71] Disabled people make up approximately 20% of the general population. The actual percentage of the population considered to be disabled is difficult to determine. One in ten, or 5 million adults in GB, experience mobility issues according to (Sense, 2017, p. 14). Evidence suggests that there are 12.9 million disabled people in the UK (Sense, 2017, p. 14). Evidence suggests that there are 12.9 million disabled people in the UK (Sense, 2017, p. 4). Latest government figures indicate 20% of the population are disabled, skewed heavily by 45% of older people being disabled. (DWP, 2019, pp. 85-95). Accessed 01/10/19.
[72] The term 'carer' was used in the survey, rather than my preferred term 'companion'. See page 28 above.

attend.[73] A correlation of the answers to the relevant questions and the presence of disabled people has not been done. If disabled people are not present, then they cannot be involved.

The limited picture painted by these figures would suggest that disabled people are not properly represented in church congregations compared with the general population. Where disabled people are present in congregations, they are not actively involved in the life of the church, and churches often do little to engage with disabled people.

From 2012 to the present, I have served as a co-opted member of the Baptist Union Council. There was a growing awareness, by the Council, that the voices of small churches and some other particular groups were not being heard within the Council. Since churches with fewer than 40 members make up half of all churches within the Baptist Union, the presence of a minister of a church with 25 members was considered helpful.[74] My interest in and experience of disability-related issues provided an additional benefit, alongside the work of enabling the voices of women, younger leaders and BAME leaders to be heard.[75] A decision had been made, by council, to reduce the number of people who constituted the membership. Many people attended Council on account of the positions they held, such as regional ministers, Association moderators, Baptist Union staff, Baptist college principals, and all former presidents of the Baptist Union of Great Britain.[76] It was felt that there should be some form of representation from the four groups indicated above.

The Baptist Union Council assumed that 10% of the population are disabled, although government statistics indicate the figure is closer to 20%, and so decided that eight members of the new Council should be disabled people. At that time there were two 'obviously' disabled people, a blind ministerial colleague and myself, both co-opted.[77] There

[73] This might be because of lack of access. For instance a respondent to a survey by 'Through the Roof 'said: "I wish churches knew that it's no good to say they don't need a ramp as they have no disabled members – as long as they have steps no wheelchair users will come!" (Through the Roof, 2015, p. 9)

[74] The proportion of small churches has remained at about the same level since the 1983 report '*Half the Denomination*' was published, when half of churches had 50 or fewer members (Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1983, p. 32). In 2019 more than half had fewer than 40 members.
See https://www.baptisttimes.co.uk/Articles/546376/A_focus_on.aspx Accessed 01/03/2020
and https://baptisttimes.co.uk/Articles/530781/Resourcing_small_Baptist.aspx Accessed 01/03/2020

[75] Minutes, Baptist Union Council, November 2012, 9

[76] The potential number of people who could attend Council prior to this was over two hundred.

[77] There were three 'obviously' disabled people for a while when another wheelchair user began serving on Council from March 2016. My colleague, who is blind, stood down from Council in September 2018. My term as a co-opted member ends in March 2021.

was also a number of people who would probably not self-identify as disabled but, due to increased age, were becoming profoundly deaf or experiencing mobility problems due to arthritis and other health related issues.[78] In discussion with my blind ministerial colleague, regional ministers, members of staff from the Baptist Union offices in Didcot, and other attendees at Council, it quickly became apparent that my experience of being one of the very few disabled people actively involved beyond the local congregation was part of a broader picture. I realised that unless disabled people were encouraged, facilitated and empowered to become fully active within and beyond their local church, the aim of having disabled people make up 10% of Baptist Union Council membership was unlikely to be achieved. It has also become apparent that, while gender and racial justice are debated, issues concerning disability justice are not often part of the discussions at Council, in Associations and presumably in local churches.[79]

At the Baptist Union Council meeting of November 2012, the role of co-option with respect to improving the representation of women, BAME community members and disabled people was addressed.[80] Initially the proposal was for co-option to be used, "… solely with the purpose of improving diversity …" to address these issues. After considerable debate the purpose of co-option was changed to a more general approach namely, "… specifically with the purpose … ."[81] The presence of disabled people who are able and willing to share the wider experiences and perceptions of disabled people within the Baptist Union Council is important. This sustains the awareness of disability issues within Baptist church communities. Through the building of relationships with key members of local Associations, the Baptist Union Council can foster a change of attitudes towards disabled people within all expressions of Baptist church communities.

[78] Those who become deaf and do not use sign language are often described as 'deaf' or 'deafened' while those who are born without hearing and use sign language are often described as 'Deaf' (Lewis, 2007, pp. 1-4). See page 98.

[79] This is borne out by my experience of running a seminar on disability issues at a local Association ministers' conference in 2016. Only four people attended while the other three seminars were all well attended.

[80] Minutes, Baptist Union Council, November 2012, 9.

[81] I was present at that meeting of Council and, in my personal opinion, the voices of women, BAME and disabled people were not listened to properly. My personal recollection is that the final wording, recorded in the minutes, was a compromise after initial discussions had removed this aim from the relevant section of the report. For both quotes see Minutes, Baptist Union Council, November 2012, 9.

2.3.2 Ecumenical Context

The lack of participatory inclusion of disabled people in Baptist church communities is in line with an ecumenical survey carried out by the Christian disability charity 'Through the Roof', in 2015,[82] and also fits with some recent research contained within Naomi Jacobs's unpublished PhD thesis.[83] This research indicates a range of factors which have tended to exclude disabled people from participation in church communities.

One of the factors shaping the experiences of disabled people in churches is the prevailing negative view of disability in society, which is exacerbated by some people in churches who focus primarily on the need for disabled people to be healed.[84] This attitude has been highlighted recently by a series of articles, blogs and programmes by BBC journalist Damon Rose, who is blind and who self-identifies as an atheist. He recounts the experience of a Christian, someone he did not know, approaching him on the London Underground and "… asking if he could pray for my sight to be restored."[85] He goes on to suggest that "… these encounters are a fact of life for people who are visibly disabled."[86] While the online document's title 'Pick up your stretcher and walk'[87] has clear allusions to Matthew 9:1-8, the written article's title 'Stop trying to 'heal' me' indicates the strength of the negative response this approach invokes.[88]

As noted above, I myself have experienced this sort of encounter within a church setting. For it to happen in a public setting, however, is troubling. The alternative assumptions about disabled people, that they need to be cared for or are 'special' in a variety of ways, are also problematic. Some respondents to the 'Through the Roof' survey '*All of us Complete in Christ*'[89] said that "… they had stopped going to church because of the barriers and attitudes they encountered."[90]

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[82] (Through the Roof, 2015)
[83] (Jacobs, 2019)
[84] (Through the Roof, 2015, p. 4)
[85] (Rose, 2019b) He met with Christians and churches that hold a wide range of views on disability and healing and this article was the result. Accessed 19/05/2019
[86] Rose, 2019b)
[87] (Rose, 2019a) Accessed 19/05/2019
[88] (Rose, 2019b)
[89] (Through the Roof, 2015)
[90] (p. 7)

Whilst recognising attitudes that tend to erect barriers and exclude disabled people, the survey does indicate some more positive perspectives. Many disabled people recognised that their experiences fostered a reliance on God and a depth of spirituality that can provide a rich resource for the life of the church. There is an evident biblical theme of recognising personal weakness and relying on God, most clearly seen in the life of the apostle Paul, whose 'thorn' might well have been some form of disability.[91] Recognizing our own weakness and frailty can provide a source of empathy towards others and can give opportunities to share the Christian message with others in similar circumstances. The idea of ministering to others out of an awareness of one's own weakness is a theme explored by such writers as Henri Nouwen. His book *The Wounded Healer*[92] had a profound impact on me when I first considered a call to ordained ministry. It challenges the assumption that ministry is only for strong, fit and non-disabled people. Many disabled people have grappled with issues concerning the goodness of God and issues of suffering, and they have found a consequent deepening of their faith. Disabled people have long recognised that God has given them gifts, but there is a sense of frustration when these gifts are not recognised by others.[93]

Naomi Jacobs has recently researched the experience of 30 disabled people from a number of Christian traditions, including both ordained and lay disabled people.[94] Her work places the voices of disabled people at the centre of her research. She uses their call for transformation in the relationship between churches and disabled people to show how this might occur.[95] Her research uncovers a complex picture of exclusion and inclusion, experienced in a variety of ways by all her participants to different degrees. While many of them expressed a deeply held desire to contribute to the life of the churches they attended (or, in some cases, had left) they were frustrated by the barriers they experienced.[96] Jacobs exposes the dominance of a 'pastoral model', which sees disabled people as passive recipients, as one of the most significant barriers to participatory inclusion.[97] Alongside this,

[91] 2 Cor. 12:7-10 (NRSV)
[92] (Nouwen, 1979)
[93] (Through the Roof, 2015, p. 9)
[94] Jacobs writes from a broadly Anglican perspective and so echoes the ordained/lay duality of the Anglican tradition. (Jacobs, 2019, p. 163f).
[95] (Jacobs, 2019, pp. 13, 248f)
[96] (Jacobs, 2019, p. 151f)
[97] (Jacobs, 2019, p. 102f)

she uses the concept of 'misfitting'[98] to explain some aspects of how disabled people are excluded. This occurs partly because of the assumption that active members of congregations, and in particular the clergy, are non-disabled people.[99] Jacobs's explicit focus on the voices of disabled people and fostering of their expressed theology provides confirmation of disabled people's experience of exclusion from church life.[100] It also provides signs of hope, with examples of people experiencing inclusion and a number of disabled people who are experiencing encouragement in their decision to seek ordination. There is also considerable potential to be found in intentional listening to the theologies of disabled people as they become agents of theological and social change.[101]

Theologian John Hull wrote extensively about his experience of going blind, particularly in his books *Touching the Rock,*[102] and also the revised and updated edition, *On Sight and Insight*.[103] These are profound accounts of his experiences of the loss of sight and have provoked significant theological reflection on metaphorical language related to sight and knowledge, and theology of disability. I shall draw on Hull's work in Chapters 3 and 5.

2.3.3 Wider Society

Looking beyond the church to the experiences of disabled people in society, the picture becomes even bleaker. Evidence suggests that disabled people experience more loneliness and lack of friendships than non-disabled people, not least due to the attitudes of non-disabled people. The report, '*Someone cares if I'm not there*',[104] by the charity Sense,[105] bluntly observes:

> Shockingly, one in two non-disabled people (49 per cent) don't believe they have anything in common with disabled people, and a quarter (26 per cent) admit they have avoided engaging in conversation with a disabled person.[106]

[98] (Jacobs, 2019, p. 103) referring to the idea of 'misfitting' developed by Garland-Thomson in Garland-Thomson, R. 1997. *Extraordinary Bodies: Figuring Disability in American Culture and Literature*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
[99] (Jacobs, 2019, p. 102f)
[100] (Jacobs, 2019, p. 123f)
[101] (Jacobs, 2019, p. 234f)
[102] (Hull, 1990)
[103] (Hull, 1997)
[104] (Sense, 2017)
[105] "Sense is a national charity that supports and campaigns for children and adults who have sensory impairments and complex needs. We provide tailored support, advice and information to individuals, their families, carers and the professionals who work with them." (Sense, 2015, p. 20; 2017, p. 40)
[106] (Sense, 2017, p. 3)

On top of the various physical barriers that disabled people face, the reticence of non-disabled people to initiate conversation or develop friendships with disabled people reinforces their experience of exclusion. Friendships between disabled and non-disabled people are critical to fostering inclusion.[107] While there are attitudinal barriers to the formation of friendships alongside physical barriers, recent changes to government policy further restrict opportunities for disabled people to access work and social spaces.[108] There are solutions to many of these barriers, but they need intentional action by a wide range of people and organisations.[109]

We live in a society that is increasingly image conscious. Social media has reinforced a narrow concept of beauty, and this is particularly problematic for young people with obvious facial disfigurements.[110] While society claims to welcome and celebrate diversity, it seems that it has become increasingly suspicious of physical diversity.

Although attitudes and relationships between disabled and non-disabled people play a significant role in the experience of exclusion or inclusion in society, these attitudes are shaped by many other factors too. Poor access to education, housing and work, leading to a reduced standard of living and health for many people, restricts the opportunities for disabled and non-disabled people to learn, work, live and socialise alongside one another.[111] Access in these areas is largely affected by government and local authority policies and resources.[112] As an example, government policy and funding has resulted in the closure of the Independent Living Fund (ILF) which had assisted disabled people who needed significant levels of support to live and work as independently as possible. The responsibility for this has been passed to local governments, with negative effects.[113]

Since 2010, when the coalition government in the UK instigated dramatic cuts in many areas of government and local authority spending, the impact of austerity has often been at odds

[107] (Sense, 2015, p. 4)
[108] (EHRC, 2017a; UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2017) Accessed 16/01/2019
[109] (Sense, 2015, p. 19)
[110] (Changing Faces, 2018, p. 2)
[111] (Ryan, 2019) provides significant evidence for this.
[112] As shown in the wide ranging critique by Ryan (Ryan, 2019) and reports such as those produced by the Equality and Human Rights Commission 'Being Disabled in Britain' (EHRC, 2017b) Accessed 16/01/2019.
[113] (EHRC, 2017b, p. 5; Ryan, 2019, pp. 81-82; UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2017, pp. 59-69)

with the stated intention of policy.[114] These policy and funding changes have been continued by the Conservative governments formed after the 2015 and 2017 general elections, and have had a particularly severe impact on disabled people, as indicated by the summary of a report by the United Nations under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.[115] Dan Goodley is particularly scathing in his critique of the impact on disabled people of social, economic and political changes in the global context.[116] It takes the voice of non-governmental organisations, such as charities, churches and even the United Nations to point out the discrepancy between the stated aim and the real impact of a wide range of policy changes.[117]

Frances Ryan's *Crippled: Austerity and the Demonization of Disabled People*[118] addresses the impact of government austerity measures on disabled people since 2010. Writing as a journalist with an academic background in politics, and as a wheelchair user, she has enabled the voices of many disabled people to be heard. These are people who have been negatively impacted by both austerity and increasingly hostile attitudes towards disabled people. Addressing the impact of austerity on disabled people's experience of poverty, work, independence, housing and the specific impact on the lives of disabled women and children, she concludes:

> The active, deliberate and persistent maltreatment of Britain's disabled people has gone beyond critical levels. Over the course of a decade, people with disabilities, chronic illness and mental health problems have been routinely driven into destitution, pushed from the workplace and stripped of the right to live in their own homes. The gains that generations of disabled campaigners fought for have been

[114] For instance, the stated intention to improve the support for disabled people while the number of people receiving the mobility component of Personal Independence Payments (PIP) has been reduced. This has led to the withdrawal of Motability lease cars from disabled people which directly impacts their employment prospects (M. Cross, 2013, p. 721).
[115] (UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2017, pp. 13-15) As well as general findings the report examined four specific areas: Living Independently and being included in the community (pp. 15-17); Work and employment (pp. 17-18); Adequate standard of living and social protection (p. 18); Systematic violations of the Convention (pp. 18-19). The impact of austerity has been much wider than disabled people. Single parents, those on low wages, those reliant on rented accommodation both state and private, and many others affected by austerity measures.
[116] (Goodley, 2017, pp. 1-3)
[117] (UNHCR, 2019, pp. 16-17) Within a critical report on the effects of extreme poverty and human rights in the UK, the report points out the disproportionate impact of poverty on disabled people and their vulnerability to cuts to services.
[118] (Ryan, 2019)

> rapidly rolled back, and the promise that the Great British welfare state would protect disabled people shown to be little more than a fantasy.[119]

During my lifetime, I have witnessed dramatic changes in society's attitudes to disabled people. This was emphasised by the overwhelmingly positive response to the London 2012 Paralympic Games. Since then, however, disabled people have often been portrayed by the government and in the media in a very negative light.[120] It seems that a contradictory view of disabled people has emerged in the last decade. On the one hand, Paralympians and other exceptionally talented disabled people are lauded as heroes; on the other hand, those who, for a variety of reasons, are reliant on the support of the state, other organisations and non-disabled people, are portrayed as 'scroungers'.[121] The reality is much more complex than this duality suggests. I suspect that many disabled people, like myself, who have achieved a good level of education and subsequent access to work and social spaces, actually exist in a borderland between these two contradictory perspectives.

2.4 Recognising a Disconnection Between My Experience and That of Others

It is apparent that there is a disconnection between some of my experiences of exclusion and inclusion and the wider experiences of disabled people, as indicated by the material explored in the previous sections. Throughout my life I have experienced both exclusion and inclusion. Some of my experiences of exclusion have shaped my desire to address the underlying barriers, so that the experience of other disabled people can become one of inclusion. My experiences of inclusion have also motivated me to understand how these have arisen. By understanding the nature of such experiences, I want other disabled people to be able to experience participatory inclusion as well.

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[119] (Ryan, 2019, p. 191)

[120] (UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2017). For a devastating summary of how the rights and independence of disabled people are being intentionally undermined see (Ryan, 2019, pp. 1-10). See also reports on negative portrayal of disabled people in the media such as https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/about-us/press-office/press-and-media-2012/press-portrayal-disabled-people-rise-hostility-fuelled Accessed 03/06/2019.

[121] (Beacom, French, & Kendall, 2016; Braye, Dixon, & Gibbons, 2012; Briant, Watson, & Philo, 2013; Crow, 2014; Dieuwertje, 2018; Richards, 2009; Weed & Dowse, 2009) are a selection of papers discussing the complex and contradictory portrayal of disabled athletes as heroes and other disabled people as scroungers. (Goodley, 2017, p. 16) notes the tension between positive and negative views of disability arising from the Paralympics. Despite the positive response to the 2012 London Paralympic Games there seems to have been little long-lasting improvement in the portrayal of ordinary disabled people.

While my experiences have tended towards being included, many other disabled people have had a less positive experience, as indicated by Jacobs's research and the reported experiences of other disabled people described above.

There have been many factors that have shaped my experiences. The foundational ones were down to my parents, medical professionals and educational staff during my early years. It is my belief that these enabled me to pursue inclusion in a wide range of situations with a common theme of developing and being open to relationships with others. The most significant of these relationships beyond the family have been the friendships I have formed with a wide variety of people. John Swinton has suggested that friendship is a 'learned activity' in the context of community.[122] Through my inclusion in the context of mainstream education I learnt the social skills of friendship, which have been a significant factor in my experience of participatory inclusion in church communities.

2.5 Research Question

In the light of my experience, I want to examine the role of relationships in general, and of friendships in particular, between disabled and non-disabled people. It is my view that a lack of such friendships reinforces the exclusion of disabled people, and their existence reinforces the inclusion of disabled people. The existence of friendships between disabled and non-disabled people is influenced by the way that non-disabled people understand disability and relate to disabled people.

Therefore, the research question that I address in this thesis can be stated like this:

> How can the fostering of friendships between disabled and non-disabled people enable participatory inclusion within Baptist Church communities?

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has critically reflected on my experiences as a wheelchair user from four perspectives: the physical environment, the language of disability, sociological understandings of disability, and theological understandings of disability. Drawing on a variety of sources I have revealed the diversity of experience within and beyond church communities. A recurrent theme has been the significance of relationships between disabled

[122] (Swinton, 2000, p. 50)

and non-disabled people. Amongst the diversity of relationships experienced by disabled people, friendship is of particular importance.

Part 2 Exploring the Barriers to the Inclusion of Disabled People

Introduction to Part 2

The second stage of the pastoral cycle is concerned with the exploration of issues identified as emerging from the experiences of the author and other disabled people as discussed in the first stage. This takes the form of three chapters, which examine metaphorical language, sociological understandings and theological understandings of disability. Each has an interim conclusion, and a separate conclusion is gathered at the end. The aim is to understand the nature of the barriers to inclusion and relationships between disabled and non-disabled people, and to explore potential bridges that can foster inclusion through enabling such relationships.

Chapter 3 Disability and Metaphorical Language

3.1 Introduction

The importance of language is highlighted by David Turner when he says:

> A study of language is vital to understanding the meanings of disability. How a society defines disability – and whom it identifies as 'disabled' or 'deformed' – can reveal much about that society's attitudes and values concerning the body, what stigmatises it, and what it considers 'typical' in terms of physical appearance and bodily attribute.[123]

The way we speak about disability, whether literally, descriptively, or metaphorically, inevitably focuses on the similarities and differences between disabled and non-disabled people.[124] Similarities tend to foster inclusion while differences reinforce exclusion.[125] This chapter examines how metaphorical language reveals and shapes contemporary understandings of disability and disabled people. I expose how such language can either erect barriers or build bridges for the fostering of relationships between disabled and non-disabled people.

3.2 The Metaphorical Nature of Language

Drawing on the work of Janet Soskice in *Metaphor and Religious Language,*[126] I want, first, to identify a theory of metaphor that will enable me to examine the effect that metaphorical language has on contemporary understandings of disability.

Regarding such theories of metaphor, Soskice says:

> A theory of metaphor should … discuss not only the speaker's intention in using metaphor but also the hearer's reception of it, how the hearer decides the speaker is speaking metaphorically rather than nonsensically, and so on.[127]

Soskice suggests that there are three dominant ways of grouping theories of metaphor: substitution, emotive and incremental.[128]

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[123] (D. M. Turner, 2012, p. 32)
[124] (Soskice, 1985, pp. 67-96) discusses 'literal' and 'metaphorical' language.
[125] (Block, 2002, p. 48) discusses the issue of the oppression of disabled people through the misuse of language relating to disability. (Block, 2002, pp. 150-152) discusses the importance of inclusive language.
[126] (Soskice, 1985)
[127] (Soskice, 1985, p. 44)
[128] (Soskice, 1985, pp. 24-51) while (Wren, 1989, pp. 87-95) covers similar ground from the angle of weak and strong metaphors.

Substitution theories include comparison theories, which see metaphors as little more than a different way of saying the same thing.[129] An example of a substitution metaphor is when the phrase 'Richard is a lion' is used instead of the phrase 'Richard is brave'. A comparison view of metaphor would suggest that 'Richard is a lion' is used as equivalent to 'Richard is like a lion in being brave.' In the first, one word is used instead of another while, in the second, the metaphor is little more than a simile.[130] These approaches to metaphor assume that a metaphor and a literal/descriptive phrase are equivalent or at least have a high degree of similarity. An example of this kind of metaphor regarding disability would be 'seeing is knowing', as in 'I see what you mean', where knowledge and sight are viewed as equivalent, but where the metaphor can also infer that those who cannot literally see are unable to have knowledge.[131]

In *Metaphorical Theology,*[132] Sally McFague argues that for metaphors to have any significant impact there needs to be tension within a metaphor between the elements of the metaphor.[133] This tension can be referred to as the 'is and is not' character of metaphor or, equally, the 'like and unlike' or 'similarity and dissimilarity'.[134] She suggests:

> Good metaphors shock, they bring unlikes together, they upset conventions, they involve tension and they are implicitly revolutionary.[135]

The examples above make it clear that there is little or no tension if the elements are thought of as being equivalent to one another, as they are in substitution theories.

Emotive theories are said to have affective impact, but do not create any new meaning from the metaphor.[136] These metaphors merely produce a strong emotional response. An example of this form would be the 'fight/battle' metaphors that are commonly used regarding cancer, and they are sometimes used with regards to disability. For example,

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[129] (Soskice, 1985, pp. 24-26)
[130] (Wren, 1989, p. 87)
[131] (Vidali, 2010, p. 34f) See Hull on blindness and metaphor (Hull, 2001, 2013). Hull's disability theology is explored on page 82.
[132] (McFague, 1982)
[133] The two elements within a metaphor are described in a variety of ways: 'vehicle and tenor', 'subsidiary and principle subject', 'subject' and 'intersecting image' (Soskice, 1985, p. 46; Wren, 1989, pp. 90, 246 (note 213)).
[134] (McFague, 1982, pp. 37-41, 74)
[135] (McFague, 1982, p. 17) An example is Nancy Eiesland's metaphor of 'the disabled God' (Eiesland, 1994), explored on pages 91f and 175f.
[136] (Soskice, 1985, pp. 26-31)

disabled people are often described as 'overcoming' the challenge of their disability.[137] One of the problems with this theory of metaphor is that it does not account for different responses to the same metaphor. For instance, the description of someone's wheelchair in terms of confinement may be responded to in quite different ways. Those who have always used a wheelchair often experience this as freedom, while those who use a wheelchair as a result of an accident or illness may experience this as restriction.[138]

Incremental theories hold out the promise of a significantly more productive way of understanding metaphors and the cognitive impact they have on the way we understand their use.[139] Of these theories Soskice writes:

> Basic to their position is the view that what is said by the metaphor can be expressed adequately in no other way, that the combination of parts in a metaphor can produce new and unique agents of meaning.[140]

Soskice identifies interanimation among the range of incremental theories.[141] This considers the cognitive, dynamic relationships between the ideas within a metaphor as a way of generating new meaning. Soskice suggests that the advantage of this approach:

> … is that it allows us to distinguish between the tenor and vehicle of the metaphor without suggesting that the metaphor has two subjects.[142]

This approach is significantly more abstract than substitution or emotive theories of metaphors, and as such can take into account the dialogical nature of language.[143] This dialogue is often triadic, where a person is using metaphorical language to speak about a subject, in our case about disability. The nature of this triadic relationship means that the language used by different people, even using the same words, can mean different things and provoke different responses. Such theories also enable us to acknowledge that truth and meaning about a subject can be conveyed in both literal/descriptive and metaphorical

[137] (Swinton, 2000, p. 63) notes their unhelpful use with regards to people with mental health problems and the Individual/Medical Model focusing on *cure* rather than *care*.
[138] The metaphor of confinement is also discussed below on page 58.
[139] (Soskice, 1985, p. 31f)
[140] (Soskice, 1985, p. 31)
[141] (Soskice, 1985, pp. 32f, 38f)
[142] (Soskice, 1985, p. 46)
[143] In Chapter 6 I connect this to McFadyen's use of communication, and therefore relationship, in the formation of personhood (McFadyen, 1990), see pages 121 and 144.

language, allowing us to examine the terms 'disabled' and 'disability' as one-word metaphors.[144]

When working with these abstract but helpful understandings of metaphor, two ideas suggested by Brian Wren, in *What Language Shall I Borrow?*[145] are helpful.[146] 'Development' refers to the impact a metaphor has and the change that it brings by its use, which can be positive or negative. Regarding disability, the negative impact of metaphors has not always been properly recognised. 'Correspondence' concerns the points of contact between the elements (or intersecting images or matrices) addressed by the metaphor. Correspondence is helpful in uncovering the assumptions of those who use a particular word. The idea of correspondence can help us understand what is happening when metaphors relating to disability are used. For example, non-disabled people sometimes use disability as a metaphor for something else, assuming there is a high degree of correspondence. This, however, reveals their misunderstanding of disability. A stark example would be 'Men are emotional cripples.'[147] Slightly more nuanced, but still problematic would be 'Men are emotionally disabled.'

3.3 Metaphor Groups and Paradigms

Metaphors are rarely used in isolation and both McFague and Wren suggest that metaphors form dominant groups, which in turn create models and paradigms that not only reflect but shape our understanding of concepts.[148]

As an example of this I want to briefly discuss the group of metaphors which describe God as King-God-Almighty-Father-Protector, that Wren refers to as KINGAFAP.[149] This group closely links issues of gender and power, fostering a view of God, church and society where gender roles are distinct and related to issues of power over others. While these metaphors infer that the 'norm' is to be male and powerful, and therefore non-disabled, they also infer that

[144] (Williams, 2014, pp. 22-30, 45-51) discusses issue of truth in metaphorical and descriptive language.(Wren, 1989, p. 88) gives 'danced/dance/dancing' as examples of single word metaphors.
[145] (Wren, 1989)
[146] (Wren, 1989, pp. 90-92)
[147] (Schalk, 2013, p. 3) She also suggests 'women are mute'.
[148] (Wren, 1989, pp. 87-92) discusses how strong metaphors can create models which 'organise thinking' while (McFague, 1982, p. 23) suggests models are formed by metaphors which have 'staying power' and so have gained wide appeal. These form paradigms which shape the way we live (McFague, 1982, p. 70). Soskice suggests a close link between metaphors and underlying models, both in theology and in science (Soskice, 1985, pp. 50, 97-116).
[149] (Wren, 1989, p. 123f)

to be female is to lack power.[150] Regarding disabled people of both genders, who have been denied agency over their lives, these metaphors can reinforce the idea of disabled people being passive and having little or no influence. They also infer that authority, power and influence are part of the experience of inclusion in the church. This creates a distance between disabled people, who are often perceived in terms of weakness and inability, and non-disabled people.

This group of metaphors also raises issues concerning who names God, the world, and the nature of gender, in ways that can reinforce patriarchal society. For example, Wren suggests that when Genesis 2:19-20 gives a biblical mandate to name the contents of creation, it is more about relatedness and care rather than control and manipulation.[151] The power to name some people as 'other' also relates to disability and disabled people, and has had a powerful influence over the portrayal of disabled people as childlike, without agency over their own lives.[152]

At a deeper level, this metaphor group also shapes how we understand the relationship between God and creation, through the associations it provides between our concepts of kings, either as absolute rulers who control every aspect of life, or as figureheads who have no direct control.[153] Wren argues that the metaphor group infers the image of an absolute monarch in complete control. An alternative view of monarchs as benign heads of state would shape a different perspective on disability. Understanding God in terms of absolute monarchy tends towards an understanding of disability as being caused directly by God. A participatory and mutual understanding of God, however, suggests an understanding of disability arising as a consequence of the way creation works. This in turn leads to the development of quite different models of disability.

Although models and the resulting paradigms are constructed and supported by the metaphor groups within them, they can also be challenged and eventually deconstructed by changes of metaphors and metaphor groups. This can be seen by the radical nature of the

[150] (Wren, 1989, pp. 13-27)
[151] (Wren, 1989, pp. 40-41)
[152] (Creamer, 2006, pp. 50-52, 69-73)
[153] (Wren, 1989, pp. 125-126)

parables of Jesus, focusing on the inclusion of those previously excluded by the Jewish leaders' interpretation of the Old Testament Law.

These parables challenged the exclusive attitudes and practises of the religious authorities of Jesus's time.[154] Jesus did this by confronting the established ideas of who is and who is not included or excluded from the kingdom of God. For example, he challenges issues of healing and status in the Parable of the Great Banquet.[155] The focus of these parables is often on how the characters relate, rather than who they are, revealing a move from old exclusive ways of acting based on status to new inclusive relationships.[156] In addition to the parables there are many occasions in the ministry of Jesus where he demonstrated these principles of inclusion in actions that welcomed "… the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind."[157]

3.4 Metaphors and Disability

Both McFague and Wren are interested in examining metaphors and the models they generate, discerning whether they are problematic or helpful in our understanding of God, God's relation to creation and the impact this has on our relationships with other people. Having done a general survey of the nature of metaphors, I now want to concentrate on seeking to understand how a range of metaphors shape contemporary understandings of disability and disabled people. This can be in ways that focus on either likeness or unlikeness between disabled and non-disabled people.

3.4.1 'Direct' and 'Indirect' Metaphors of Disability

Although rarely understood as metaphors, the words 'disability' and 'disabled' are themselves metaphors.[158] The tension within 'dis-able' is created by the way the prefix 'dis-' is widely used in negative terms, as in disunity, disallow, disagree, and the way that '-able' infers ideas of ability and achievement, and hence of 'normal' bodies.[159] This leads to a low level of correspondence: there are few points of contact between the negative ideas around 'dis-' and the positive around '-able', which in turn creates a distance between conceptions

[154] (McFague, 1982, p. 39)
[155] Luke 14:15-24
[156] (McFague, 1982, p. 108)
[157] Luke 14:13 (NRSV)
[158] David Tabb Stewart uses the notation '(dis)ability' when he is talking about both disability and ability at the same time (Stewart, 2017, p. 58f). Goodley suggests the term 'dis/ability' as a way of examining the relationship between disablism/disability and ableism through discourse analysis (Goodley, 2017, pp. 125-134).
[159] (Stiker, 1999, pp. 1-22) discusses the negative impact of such prefixes.

of dis-abled and able-bodied people. Here, the term 'able-bodied' rather than 'non-disabled' is used to emphasise the metaphorical tension and its impact on the relationship between disabled and non-disabled people.[160] Although this means that the use of 'disabled' and related terms has a negative metaphorical tension at its heart, historical terms such as 'handicapped' result in a greater emphasis on unlikeness between disabled and non-disabled people.

The frequently used term 'para-athlete', which refers to participants in high level sports events for physically disabled people, is an example of a disability metaphor which has both positive and negative impacts.[161] The Paralympic Games and the related Commonwealth Paraplegic Games have their origins in the use of sporting events as part of the rehabilitation work at Stoke Mandeville Spinal Injuries Unit in the mid-twentieth century.[162]

Although the contemporary emphasis of these two events is on competitions where disabled and non-disabled run alongside one another, the origins lie in events for paraplegics. There remains a tension between the 'para' of paraplegia (and other forms of physical disability) as a severe restriction, and Olympic achievement. This paradox gives rise to an understanding of disabled people who have been widely praised in the press for their sporting achievements, despite their impairments.[163] There are some obvious positive links to the apostle Paul's athlete metaphors, and his belief that his own weakness reveals God's power.[164]

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[160] See discussion of terminology in Chapter 1.

[161] (Harrasser, 2017) discusses the relationships between disabled athletes, technology and concepts of being superhuman.

[162] (Apelmo, 2012, p. 400). "The word 'Paralympic' derives from the Greek preposition 'para' (beside or alongside) and the word 'Olympic'. Its meaning is that Paralympics are the parallel Games to the Olympics and illustrates how the two movements exist side-by-side." http://www.paralympic.org/the-ipc/history-of-the-movement Accessed 28/03/2019. Since 1960, the Paralympic Games have been held in the same country as the Olympic Games, and, since 1988 (summer games) and 1992 (winter games), have occurred in the same cities and venues. https://www.paralympic.org/ipc/history Accessed 15/08/2019.
The Commonwealth Paraplegic Games ran from 1962 to 1974, held in the same country as the Commonwealth Games. Since 1994 the Commonwealth games have had para-athletic events alongside the non-disabled events. Since 2002 disabled and non-disabled events have been fully integrated. The difference in scale means that the Paralympics and Olympics cannot occur at the same time although they use the same venues a few weeks apart. https://www.disabilitysport.org.uk/index.html Accessed 15/08/2019.

[163] 'Impairment' is the term used within the Social Model of Disability for differences in functionality, distinct from 'Disability', which is the social response to people with impairments. See pages 72f below.

[164] The apostle Paul's athlete metaphor arises in Acts 20:24, 1 Cor. 9:24, Gal. 2:2; 5:7, 2 Titis 4:7, Heb. 12:1. Paul's understanding of strength through weakness arises in Rom. 8:26, 1 Cor. 15:43, 2 Cor. 11:30; 12:9; 13:4. The 2 Cor. 12:9 reference is in the context of Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' (12:7) which has been interpreted in various ways including some form of disability.

The tension, between 'para' and 'athlete', gets resolved in two different ways. Firstly, and positively, former para-athletes such as Dame Tanni Grey-Thomson, a world-record-holding wheelchair racer, is now a tireless and effective campaigner and advocate for disability equality. There is increased reporting of problems faced by disabled people when using public transport.[165] Frank Gardner, the BBC security correspondent, paralysed after being shot, has highlighted problems disabled people face when using air transport.[166]

Secondly, we find a negative resolution to the tension. The image of para-athletes has created a sub-group of 'worthy' disabled people, who win medals, in contrast to 'unworthy' disabled people, who require state support. This reinforces the way disabled people are often portrayed as scroungers and deeply affected by austerity measures since 2010 noted previously.[167] Most disabled people's achievements do not correspond to those of para-athletes who have been described in terms such as hero, overcomer and supercrip, which in turn gives a misrepresentation of the lives of the majority of disabled people.

There are also occasions when 'disability' is used indirectly, in other words when disability is used as one element of a metaphor about something else. If we for a moment consider a definition of metaphor as "… that figure of speech whereby we speak about one thing [A] in terms which are seen to be suggestive of another [B],"[168] then disability [A] can be used to speak about something else [B]. This causes problems in the following way. To illuminate or understand [B] we seek connections with [A] which we assume we know well. The higher the degree of correspondence between [A] and [B], the greater the impact the metaphor has. The problem arises if the understanding of [A] is inaccurate. So, for example, the metaphor 'men are emotional cripples'[169] reveals negative assumptions about disability when talking about men.[170] Comparing sexist or racist individuals to disabled people undermines the

[165] Multiple media articles in January 2017 regarding the experience of Anne Wafula Strike, a Paralympian who uses a wheelchair, on a train journey in December 2016. For example, https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-essex-38495184 Accessed 14/04/2020.
[166] Regarding his disability http://www.frankgardner.co.uk/background/ Accessed 07/08/2019. Regarding his experience of getting 'left' on aircraft when other passengers have alighted https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-45103327 Accessed 07/08/2019.
[167] See (Garthwaite, 2011) for an analysis of this negative portrayal of disabled people by the 2010-15 UK coalition government. Frances Ryan's discussion of the impact of austerity is outlined on page 43 above.
[168] (Soskice, 1985, pp. 15, 49)
[169] (Schalk, 2013, pp. 2, 4, 12) discussing the terminology used by feminist writer bell hook (intentional lower case) in *The Will to Change* (2004) New York, Atria Books.
[170] This critique is based on a substitution theory of metaphor, of the form 'this is that', rather than on an interanimation theory, although the broader critique is still valid.

argument for justice in these fields and alienates disabled people.[171] Negative assumptions about disability also occur in literature, film and theatre, creating a negative context for our understanding of disability.[172]

3.4.2 Metaphors that Influence Understandings of Disability

Alongside the groups of metaphors that relate directly and indirectly to disability are a wide range of metaphors that shape how disability is understood. These metaphors can emphasise either the difference or similarity between disabled and non-disabled people. They include metaphors concerning embodiment, the nature of the church, and images of God.

The most obvious of the metaphors related to embodiment are those that can have both literal/descriptive and metaphorical uses: walking, seeing, and hearing.[173] For non-disabled people these terms are used primarily to describe how they perceive and interact with the world in literal and descriptive ways. For many disabled people they are used primarily in metaphorical ways. As a wheelchair user who cannot physically stand, I use 'walk' as a metaphor for moving from one place to another when a non-disabled person would use it in a literal/descriptive sense. In this way I am deliberately emphasising the similarities between myself and non-disabled people. If I were to use the term 'wheel', which is a more literal description of the way I move, then I am emphasising the differences between myself and non-disabled people. From conversations with friends and colleagues who are blind or Deaf, the use of 'see' and 'hear' can be understood in a similar way.[174]

Metaphors of walking and seeing have a deep resonance in a Baptist context. We express ideas of our covenant relationship with God and one another in terms of 'walking together'

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[171] (May & Ferri, 2005) discusses how feminists have resisted being labelled as 'mad, 'bad' or 'deviant', before examining inappropriate uses of disability as a metaphor. (Meekosha, 1998, p. 173) notes how feminist writers use negative disability metaphors concerning infertility and oppression. (Watts & Erevelles, 2004) critiques the use of disability as a metaphor for racism.

[172] (Warner, 2011) explores that effect of these negative stereotypes in plays and films, where antagonists are sometimes identified by their obvious impairments such as an eye patch or false leg. David Miller and Sharon Snyder have coined the phrase 'narrative prosthesis' to describe the way that disability is used in literature 'as a stock feature of characterisation and … as an opportunistic metaphoric device' (Mitchell & Snyder, 2013, p. 222) with disability predominantly being portrayed in negative terms. See (Jacobs, 2019, pp. 77-78, 212, 213) for UK perspective. These negative assumptions can also affect the way we interpret disability in the Bible.

[173] (Black, 1996, p. 57ff) addresses the metaphorical interpretations of blindness, deafness, paralysis, leprosy and chronic illness, mental illness as she examines how the gospel healing miracles are preached. She does not address how these passages relate to people with learning disabilities.

[174] (Lewis, 2007, pp. 1-4)

and 'watching over one another'.[175] These metaphors have a biblical context and occur throughout the Old and New Testaments.[176] Take, for example, the use of 'walk' in some New Testament texts.[177] There are many occasions when 'walk' is used as a verb referring to the physical act of moving about.[178] The references to "the lame walk",[179] seen as a messianic sign, have both literal/descriptive and metaphorical senses, since Jesus did heal the physically lame and enable them to walk, while those made metaphorically lame by their burdens are enabled to live lives free from these. There are other occasions when 'walk' is used only in a metaphorical sense with regards to the relationship between believers and God.[180] Some of these occurrences are translated inconsistently: the NASB is consistent in translating *peripateô* as 'walk'; the NIV translates some occurrences as 'walk' and others as 'live'.[181] In the Old Testament there is a parallel with the New Testament use referred to above, where 'walk' refers to a person's ongoing relationship with God, found in the phrase 'walk before/with God'.[182] There are similar issues of difference in translation between NASB and NIV.[183] In the Psalms there are occurrences of parallelism between 'walk' and 'stand', both referring to the psalmist's relationship with God as well as between 'walk' and 'righteousness', 'living' and 'trust' among others.[184] In Psalm 26:3, 4 there is an interesting contrast between "walking in God's ways" rather than "sitting with deceitful people" and in Psalm 56:13 a contrast between 'walking' and 'stumbling'.[185] This may give rise to a negative view of those who cannot walk or stand, at least implicitly and on occasion explicitly.

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[175] (Fiddes, 2003, pp. 21-24)

[176] The Baptist context for these is discussed on page 115.

[177] According to my search for *peripateô* there are 105 occurrences in the New Testament.

[178] For instance, Matt. 4:18.

[179] See Matt. 11:5 fulfilled for example in Matt. 9:1-8 and 15:31.

[180] For instance, Mark 7:5 referring to keeping the Jewish traditions or Rom. 8:4 referring to living lives according to God's ways not those of the world. Jesus uses 'walk' in this sense in John 11:9-10 and 12:35. A theme picked up in 1 John 1:6,7; 2:6,11; 2 John 1:4,6; 3 John 1:3,4.

[181] NASB has minor exceptions to this consistency, for example Rom. 13:13; 2 Cor. 12:18. NIV translates as 'live' in the following verses – Mark 7:5; Acts 21:21; Rom. 6:4; 8:4; 2 Cor. 5:7; 10:2-3; Gal. 5:16; Eph. 2:2; 4:1; 4:17; 5:2,8,15; Phil. 3:17,18; Col. 1:10; 2:6; 3:7; 1 Thess. 2:12; 4:1. In Rom. 14:15; 1 Cor. 3:3 NIV translates 'walking according to love' as 'acting in love'. In John 6:66 NIV translates 'walk' as 'follow'.

[182] For example, Gen. 17:1 referring to Abraham's relationship with God.

[183] For instance, Exod. 16:4 NASB uses 'walk in my instructions' and NIV uses 'follow my instructions'. Exod. 18:20 is a closer parallel with NASB using 'walk' and NIV using 'live'. My brief survey suggests the NASB and NIV are more consistent in the Old Testament.

[184] For instance, Pss. 1:1,2; 15:2; 23:4; 26:1. 'Stand' is also used literally and metaphorically throughout the Old Testament.

[185] Ps. 82:5 uses a metaphor of 'walking in darkness' to refer to not understanding something. This is similar to the 'seeing is knowing' metaphor with respect to those who are blind not knowing something. See also Ps. 89:15. Ps. 101:2, 6 links walking and purity. Ps. 115:7 suggests that idols are powerless because 'they have feet but cannot walk'.

The use of 'walk', 'see' and 'hear' affects the inclusion of disabled people when there is a blurring or confusion over whether these terms are used in a literal/descriptive or metaphorical sense. John Hull, in his book *In The Beginning There Was Darkness*,[186] examines the connection between the description of blind people in both Old and New Testaments, and the negative way that the metaphors of sight and blindness are used. He identifies the recurrent assumption of being sighted, even when sight/blindness is not explicitly mentioned.[187] He points out that the Bible was written by sighted people. If this is not recognised, then "… blind and partially sighted people are likely to find themselves alienated from the Bible without understanding why."[188] There are assumptions, either implicit or explicit, that are made about how people's physical ability to walk, see and hear, is directly related to their relationship with God. Disabled people may be unintentionally excluded if such confusion occurs. This may happen through the commonly used phrase 'Please stand …' prior to congregational singing or other forms of response to God. A more inclusive phrase might be 'Please stand if you are (comfortably) able to …'

There are other less obvious metaphors, two of which are worth discussing briefly – 'confinement' and 'cyborg'. The first relates to the common perception that disabled people are restricted by their impairments. As indicated previously, a common way of describing a wheelchair user is that they are 'confined to a wheelchair' and more broadly that someone is 'restricted by their disability'.[189] This language serves to emphasise the differences between disabled and non-disabled people and may not reflect the actual and varied experiences of disabled people. For instance, my use of a wheelchair is experienced as freedom and movement, whereas someone who uses a wheelchair as the result of a serious accident experiences their wheelchair as confining and restricting.[190]

My use of a wheelchair is so integrated into my life experience that it almost becomes part of my body and is certainly part of my experience of embodiment. This is most noticeable

[186] (Hull, 2001)
[187] (Hull, 2001, p. 3)
[188] (Hull, 2001, p. 67)
[189] See previous discussion of confinement on page 50.
[190] The Times journalist Melanie Reid broke her back in a riding accident in 2010 and speaks of being confined to a wheelchair. She writes a regular column entitled 'Spinal Column' in the Times newspaper, www.thetimes.co.uk. For example, Reid's columns of 20th May 2011 and 8th July 2017 refer to herself and other wheelchair users as being 'confined to a wheelchair'. This phrase is a dominant term used to refer to wheelchair users in the Times.

when I transfer between manual and electric wheelchairs, which behave very differently.[191] This experience has been explored through the metaphor of 'cyborg', which is "… a hybrid of an organism and machine".[192] Research has shown that some disabled people experience the use of technology as empowering.[193] In a similar way, the late Professor Stephen Hawking used to comment that his 'old fashioned' computerised voice had become so much a part of his personal and public identity, that he would not replace it with a more 'natural' voice available with updated voice synthesisers. It seems, however, that the cyborg metaphor might not sit so easily with non-disabled people who relate to and use technology in a more remote way.[194] The 'unlike' aspect of this metaphor for non-disabled people is undoubtedly shaped by images of cyborgs used in films, from the violence of Terminator to the malevolent Borg in the Star Trek franchise. The 'like' aspect is emphasised by a character such as Data in the Star Trek franchise, an android, is a positive image of robots, perhaps because 'he' appears and acts in ways that are more like human beings than like robots. With rapid technological advances offering increased possibilities for biological and technological integration, the metaphor of cyborg may soon be seen more positively.

The different responses to the use of language between those with congenital and those with acquired disabilities, and, more broadly, between disabled and non-disabled people, may be partly explained by the concept of 'focusing illusion'. The 'focusing illusion' is where non-disabled people only 'see' the wheelchair, and not the person who is using it, and the assumed perceived negative impact of its use influences how they relate to the person. The dominant focus for non-disabled people, and those who become disabled through illness or accident, is on the negative element of confinement, which makes wheelchair users unlike non-disabled people.[195] This viewpoint is not clear cut. For example, I have a friend who now uses a wheelchair some of the time, due to vestibular impairment, and views his wheelchair as a source of freedom. When someone becomes disabled their experience is shaped partly by their prior perception of disabled people. Frances Ryan suggests this attitude is reinforced

[191] I remember clearly the first time that I used a modern light-weight wheelchair rather than the heavy NHS issued wheelchair that I had used for most of my teens and twenties.
[192] (Apelmo, 2012, p. 402)
[193] (Apelmo, 2012) Discusses how young female disabled athletes integrate their wheelchairs into their identity and see them in a positive and enabling way, rather than a sign of difference as seen from a non-disabled perspective. The cyborg metaphor is also used in analysis of the impact of the Paralympics.
[194] An exploration of such attitudes and how they may change with recent dramatic increases in the use of technology in everyday lives is beyond the scope of this thesis.
[195] (Amundson, 2010, p. 381; Schkade & Kahneman, 1998, pp. 340-341)

by the generally negative perception of wheelchairs by non-disabled people.[196] The same may occur in reverse if disabled people perceive a lack of impairment as relating to happiness or contentment of non-disabled people.

There are also potential issues concerning assumptions that may arise from the metaphors of the church as a building or a body. If disabled people's experience of church is physical inaccessibility, then the image of the church as a building may well be problematic. The metaphor of the church as a body, influenced by the dominance of power metaphors for God, may lead to the assumption that the body in question is non-disabled.[197] This has a double effect: disabled people may feel alienated because their bodies are unlike the body of the church; and non-disabled people might assume that those whose bodies are not perceived as perfect are excluded from the body of Christ.[198] Some of the models of the church, as body, building and gathered people, will be explored in Chapters 6.[199]

3.5 God as Friend

There are relational metaphors which potentially influence how we understand the relationships between disabled and non-disabled people. Within church communities, the most common is the familial language of brother and sister, used when talking about our relationships with other members of a church community. This closely relates to the common metaphor of God as Father when talking about our relationship with Godself. McFague's metaphor of God as 'friend' is another such metaphor, suggesting a relationship that has the potential to bring mutuality to the fore.[200] McFague outlines this metaphor towards the end of *Metaphorical Theology*[201] and develops it further in *Models of God*.[202]

[196] (Ryan, 2019, pp. 100-101)
[197] 1 Cor. 12:12-31
[198] Deborah Creamer argues that there is an assumption that 'body' means a 'normal body' which excludes disabled people (Creamer, 2010, pp. 53--56). Samuel George examines how these assumptions about the body affect the mission of the church (George, 2011, p. 96).
[199] Some metaphors of the church, such as being a building, infer similarity. For instance, the simile in 1 Pet. 2:5 'you also, like living stones …' suggests similarity rather than difference between the stones of the building. This emphasis is also present in the metaphor of the church as a body; we are alike in being different parts of the same body. The metaphor of being a people of God, however, can be understood as emphasising diversity. See page 155 for further discussion of the effect of these metaphors in a Baptist context.
[200] McFague's metaphor is part of her metaphor group of God as Mother, Lover, Friend approach which 'renames' the persons of the Trinity. (McFague, 1987, p. 91ff)
[201] (McFague, 1982, pp. 177-192)
[202] (McFague, 1987) Discussed in Chapter 7 on pages 165f.

The suggestion of this metaphor arises from McFague's search for a way to liberate our relationship with God from assumptions of patriarchy and power.[203] She says:

> Christian liberation at its most profound level must address human bondage to the conventions and expectations of the ways of the world in contrast to the freedom of life according to the way of God's new rule.[204]

McFague primarily applies this to the liberation of women from the long history of oppression by men and the effect of the dominant masculine metaphors as discussed by Wren. As I seek to find ways of liberating disabled people from being excluded from church communities, I believe that there are helpful parallels through the reappraisal of relational metaphors.

Regarding the liberatory power of metaphors, McFague says:

> The experience of people relating to God as the One who frees them from the particular chains that bind their bodies and spirits issues in metaphors too numerous to enumerate: liberator, comrade, creator, mother, friend, rock, father, thunder, lover, brother, teacher, sister, light, fire, defender, sustainer, nurturer, advocate and so on. The images that tumble from the mouths of those experiencing the liberating love of God are not meant *to describe* God so much as to *suggest the new quality of relationships* being offered to them.[205]

These metaphors relate to her focus on the relationships experienced by women with God and other people. I suggest that some of these may influence the relationships between disabled and non-disabled people.

The metaphor of friend is firmly grounded in the Biblical narrative, for example with Abraham being described as God's friend and Jesus's offer of friendship with his disciples.[206] McFague's discussion of God as friend is beneficial to both disabled and non-disabled people in three ways. Firstly, friend removes the gender issues which have led not only to patriarchal oppression of women, but also to the abuse of power and consequently the oppression of disabled people, often seen as those who are weak. Secondly, the language of friend brings to the fore the importance of mutuality, cooperation and reciprocity that has sometimes been lacking in relationships with disabled people. Thirdly, the language of friendship potentially includes people of different age, colour and religion as it enables a

[203] (McFague, 1982, pp. 164-177)
[204] (McFague, 1982, p. 165)
[205] (McFague, 1982, p. 166) Italics original
[206] (McFague, 1982, p. 178)

recognition of relationship between diverse people, to which may be added the wide variety of disabled people.[207] Building on her focus on the centrality of Jesus as a parable of God, McFague suggests that Jesus's relationships with those on the fringes of society is best understood through the metaphor of friend.[208] This metaphor can assist a move from 'doing for' to 'being with', since friendship with God means "… we are no longer under but with and in God".[209]

McFague briefly outlines four implications of her metaphor of God as friend. Firstly, she recognises that the nature of authority between friends is different than between parents and children. In friendship, there is a much greater emphasis on mutuality and seeking the good of each other. Concerning issues of reconciliation, she argues that between parents and children there is an imbalance so that "… children *expect* parents to forgive them, while parents *expect* children to confess their wrongdoing."[210] Between friends, she suggests that mutual reconciliation, born out of a recognition of the grief at a ruptured relationship, can lead to a "… new dimension of relationship."[211]

Secondly, she argues that the saving activity of God as friend challenges some traditional understandings of God as "… all-powerful protector, comforter and savior (*sic*)."[212] She argues that the purely objective models of salvation do not allow for any aspect of cooperation in God's plan. This approach infantilises and individualises salvation in ways that can reinforce historical understandings of disabled people. Using rather polemic language, McFague argues that:

> Any notion of salvation which presumes that individuals can be rescued *from* the world; that does not take seriously our necessary efforts to participate in the struggle against oppression and for well-being; or that allows us to abjure our responsibility by appealing as children to a father who will alone protect and save – any such notion must be seen as immoral, irrelevant and destructive.[213]

[207] (McFague, 1982, pp. 178-179)
[208] (McFague, 1982, pp. 180-182)
[209] (McFague, 1982, p. 180) This idea is developed on pages 119f, where I examine Fiddes's perspective on God as Trinity. The phrases 'doing for' and 'being with' are key ideas suggested by (Wells, 2015) discussed on page 126.
[210] (McFague, 1982, p. 183)
[211] (McFague, 1982, p. 183)
[212] (McFague, 1982, p. 184)
[213] (McFague, 1982, pp. 185-186)

As a contrast to the dominant understanding of salvation as God 'doing for' humanity, the metaphor of God as friend brings a broader understanding of God 'being with' humanity "… as we suffer and work towards overcoming these evils and the perversity of our hearts from which they come."[214]

Thirdly, McFague recognises that "… the thought of praying to a friend probably seems odd if not inappropriate to most of us."[215] She starts with the observation that asking for forgiveness and acceptance is, for most people, experienced between friends and colleagues rather than with parents. The understanding of God as friend is therefore a good analogy of our relationship with God compared with other people with regards to this aspect of worship. Such an understanding of our relationship with God brings an intimacy and immediacy to our relationship. McFague argues that God as friend, "… as a nonfamilial, non-gender-related image … crosses the boundaries separating people of different classes, sexes, races, ages, and religions."[216] This has the potential to bring an inclusive aspect to our gathering together to worship God as friend, which also includes disabled people.

Fourthly, McFague recognises that there are limitations to the model of God as friend. She suggests that "… the model of friendship does not, it seems to me, have the potential for becoming a root-metaphor in the way that the patriarchal model presumably has."[217] One advantage, McFague suggests, is that the model is less likely to be elevated to that of an idol than the patriarchal one has been. I agree with her that rather than seeking to make God as friend the dominant metaphor, it should be added to the range of existing metaphors to bring a greater depth to our understanding of the ways in which we relate with God and with one another. McFague recognises that we need to avoid the model of God becoming too individualistic and that it needs to be balanced with other models "… which differentiate the difference between the status of the friends."[218] She acknowledges too that this model also fails to express "… experiences of awe, ecstasy, fear and silence in relating to God."[219]

[214] (McFague, 1982, p. 186)
[215] (McFague, 1982, p. 188)
[216] (McFague, 1982, p. 189)
[217] (McFague, 1982, p. 190)
[218] (McFague, 1982, p. 191)
[219] (McFague, 1982, p. 191)

Having laid the groundwork of this metaphorical model of God as friend I shall return to this in Chapter 7, where I propose that friendship has the potential to foster greater participatory inclusion of disabled people within faith communities.[220]

3.6 Interim Conclusion

By examining and challenging the way metaphors have negatively shaped our understanding of disability, we can undermine the paradigm that has restricted disabled people to reliance on non-disabled people and understood disability as an individual problem rather than one rooted in society. The way metaphor groups form paradigms and models also influences the sociological and theological understandings of disability. These are the focus of the next two chapters. The close relationship between metaphor and model either sustains outdated exclusionary models of disability or undermines these by replacing them with more appropriate inclusive models.

We are often unaware of the impact of the language we use. Naive use of language may unintentionally emphasise the differences between disabled and non-disabled people, negatively impacting mutuality. It can sustain a situation where the historic influence and power of non-disabled people over the lives of disabled people is sustained. By emphasising differences, intentionally or unintentionally, the language we use may sustain the notion of two homogenous groups of people, 'the disabled' and 'the able-bodied', who only relate to one another in the most superficial and general terms. This denies the importance of difference and fails to recognise the particularity of individual disabled people and their experiences. I have shown that the use of metaphorical language, directly and indirectly relating to disability, can focus on differences and build barriers, which inhibit the development of mutually inclusive relationships, while also suggesting some inclusive alternatives by recognising similarities.

[220] See page 165.

Chapter 4 Disability and Sociological Models

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I examine the impact that a number of sociological models of disability have had on contemporary understandings of disability. I look at the potential ways that these affect relationships between disabled and non-disabled people. While primarily drawing on writers within the discipline of sociology, I also utilise material from the wider context of disability studies, an interdisciplinary field of study that has emerged since the late twentieth century.

I use a three-stage approach proposed by Dan Finkelstein, an early proponent of the shift from an individual/medical understanding of disability to a social model.[221] He proposed three historical phases. Phase one covers the period prior to the eighteenth century when most of the population was living in rural communities. Phase two covers the early eighteenth to the late twentieth century, when the industrial revolution led to a shift from rural to urban communities and instigated significant changes to the means of production.[222] Phase three, from the late twentieth century, would, according to Finkelstein, be a period when disability would be 'removed', as societal attitudes and actions would be changed to enable full inclusion of disabled people.

4.2 Individual/Medical Model of Disability

In 1976 the World Health Organisation produced the following definitions of what has become known as the Individual/Medical Model of Disability:

> *Impairment* – Any loss or abnormality of psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function.
>
> *Disability* – Any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being.
>
> *Handicap* – A disadvantage for an individual, resulting from an impairment or disability, that limits or prevents the fulfilment of a role (depending on age, sex, social and cultural factors) for that individual.[223]

[221] (Finkelstein, 1981, 2013)
[222] The 'means of production' encompasses more than the physical method of producing manufactured goods and includes related social and economic factors (Marks, 1999, p. 81)
[223] (Barnes & Mercer, 2010, p. 20) Quoting from (WHO, 1980, pp. 27-29).

This set of definitions was designed to address 'loss or abnormality' due to impairments. These impairments are measured by a medical diagnosis concerning 'psychological, physiological or anatomical structures'. Disability is defined as directly resulting from impairment and is seen in terms of inability to perform various activities. The problematic term 'handicap' then defines any disadvantage that a disabled person experiences due to inability to fulfil a role that society assumes to be normal for a human being. It is this explicit focus on the individual and their impairment, from which disability and handicap are assumed to arise, which led to the naming of this set of definitions as the Individual/Medical Model of Disability.[224]

In my own situation, my impairment arises from a medical condition called spina bifida, which means that I cannot walk. According to this model of disability, my inability to walk is identified as an impairment. My disability is the restriction my impairment places on my ability to move independently and carry out tasks that a non-disabled person would do, which in turn produces the disadvantage described as handicap.[225] This leads to my handicap being understood as the disadvantage I experience due to my disability and impairment. Within this model, the attitudes and actions of other people and society as a whole are not taken into account.

4.2.1 Origins

The Individual/Medical Model of Disability is a retrospective model based on the dominant understanding of disability in the 1970s. The trajectory for this understanding of disability was set in the early eighteenth century at the time of the industrial revolution, alongside industrialisation, institutionalisation, and medicalisation.[226]

The first factor that began to shape the understanding of disability was the change to the means of production that accompanied the rapid industrialisation that occurred throughout this period. Production became more mechanised, leading to the development of factories, and, in turn, the population shifted from rural to urban. This led to significant changes in the place of disabled people in society. There was an increased focus on the productivity of individuals, which began to exclude disabled people who were less productive than non-

[224] (Creamer, 2009, pp. 22-25) outlines and critiques the Individual/Medical Model of Disability.
[225] Contrasted to the Social Model understanding of my disability on page 73 below.
[226] Phase 2 of Finkelstein's framework (Finkelstein, 1981, 2013).

disabled workers. The dislocation from the networks of family and neighbours that had existed in rural communities exacerbated their exclusion.

Although there is a strong link between this change and the place of disabled people in society, even this element of change is not as straightforward as some suggest.[227] For instance, it has to be recognised that the means of production varies with location, method and other factors overlapping for a period of time, meaning that disabled people were affected by their local situation as well as the wider societal context.[228] For example, in a rural setting the changes would have had a different impact from those happening in an urban setting.

The focus on the means of production, and on those people who are most economically productive, is what John Swinton calls 'clock time'. Clock time is measured in hours and minutes rather than the slow rhythm of the changing seasons which had previously shaped rural life.[229] Swinton suggests that:

> Our historical and cultural constructions of time have taught us to pay the wrong kind of attention to people living with certain forms of disability.[230]

The second factor concerns the focus on the productivity of disabled people and how this shaped the experience of disabled people during this period. In the eighteenth century there was an increase in the provision of institutions to meet the needs of disabled and other people who were not able to support themselves or were considered to be a burden on society.[231] These institutions included workhouses, asylums, hospitals, and various charitable and benevolent organisations.[232] The move from the home to institutional contexts distanced disabled people physically and socially from mainstream, non-disabled society.

Churches became significant providers of care and support to various groups, sometimes through the provision of institutional care. The institutional context of disabled people led to

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[227] (Borsay, 1998; Oliver, 1990; Oliver & Barnes, 2012)
[228] For instance, during this period both home-based and factory-based manufacturing occurred alongside the social and economic structures that supported both. (Gleeson, 1999, pp. 105-106)
[229] (Swinton, 2016, pp. 35-56)
[230] (Swinton, 2016, p. 36)
[231] (Barnes, 1990, pp. 23-29) although (Braddock & Parish, 2001, pp. 11-68) shows that religious institutions were providing care and support for disabled people throughout phase one. The role of workhouses, hospitals, asylums and schools for disabled children is examined in (Borsay, 2005, pp. 17-116).
[232] (Lewis, 2007, p. 85ff) discusses how disabled people came to be viewed as objects of charitable giving and support.

highly asymmetric relationships between disabled residents and non-disabled staff, perceived as 'helped' and 'helper'.[233] More symmetrical or mutual relationships did, however, exist among some disabled people within institutions. For example, despite the restrictions he experienced living with cerebral palsy, Joey Deacon, who lived in an institution for all of his life, wrote his autobiography with the help of other disabled residents.[234]

Alongside the rise in various forms of institutions was a parallel rise in the means of identifying groups of people who qualified for support and/or admittance to these sources of support and care, partly through the use of medical diagnosis.[235] Although the intention of these measures, such as the 1834 'Poor Law', was to identify those who qualified for support, the insistence that this was provided 'inside' institutions rather than 'outside' in the community emphasised the disabled/non-disabled distinction. There is some worrying contemporary evidence of a return to this approach under ongoing austerity measures.[236]

The third factor shaping the individual/medical understanding of disability was the wider medicalisation of disability, using medical diagnosis to define disability. This arose partly from the growth of natural science during the Enlightenment, which led to the imposition, initially by doctors and those in related professions, of the Individual/Medical Model of Disability. This imposition is not as straightforward as was initially thought, and recent historical research has begun to examine the complex nature of this relationship.[237] David Turner, writing on the history of disability, concludes that a straight forward view of the 'rise of medicine' during this period, as held by some early writers in disability studies, is naïve, and that the context that shaped the understanding of disability and the lives of disabled people is very complex.[238] In discussing the early stage of these developments, he notes that this created a greater distance between patients and practitioners.[239]There were, however,

[233] (Finkelstein, 1981)
[234] (Deacon, 1974)
[235] (Oliver & Barnes, 2012, pp. 61-65)
[236] (Ryan, 2019, p. 81f) describes the re-institutionalisation of disabled people, reversing the long fought for ability to live and work in the community with appropriate support.
[237] (Borsay, 2005) provides a detailed analysis of the complex ways that disability was understood during the period from the mid-eighteenth to the late twentieth century.
[238] (D. M. Turner, 2012, pp. 146-152)
[239] (D. M. Turner, 2012, pp. 44-57)

some positive outcomes, such as the development of hospitals during the period, which did bring many benefits to disabled people.[240]

While these are the key factors that were identified by Finkelstein and others, there was a wide range of other issues which informed the understanding of disability during this time; issues such as gender, class and race intersect with disability in ways that can both exacerbate and ameliorate the relationship between disabled and non-disabled people.[241] The way disability is understood is also influenced by economic factors, ideology and politics.[242]The complexity of the nature of understanding disability leads Catherine Kudlick to say disability studies:

> … invites scholars to think about disability not as an isolated, individual medical pathology but instead as a key defining social category on a par with race, class and gender.[243]

Dan Goodley suggests that "…disability cannot be considered independently of age, ethnicity, sexuality, class and gender."[244] My own experiences of disability are partly shaped by being white, heterosexual, middle-class and male.

Unlike race, class and gender, the 'solution' has historically been to rehabilitate disabled people so that they are 'normalised', enabling them to fit and to live within mainstream, non-disabled society.[245] In recent years, this approach and these assumptions have been largely, but not completely, overturned. For instance, considerable research, time, money and effort is focused on restoring the ability of a particular person to walk after an accident or illness. While this does have some positive outcomes, it is possible that the use of a wheelchair may be more realistic.

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[240] (D. M. Turner, 2012, pp. 42-44) For instance, surgery to reduce the impact of a club foot.
[241] (D. M. Turner, 2012, pp. 103-104,122-104)
[242] (Oliver, 1990, pp. 25-41, 43-59, 95-111; Oliver & Barnes, 2012, pp. 77-142)
[243] (Kudlick, 2003, p. 764)
[244] (Goodley, 2017, pp. xv, 44-62) where he examines the intersection of disability and four 'social markers': ethnicity; sexuality; class; and gender.
[245] Borsay argues that during the nineteenth century, medical approaches to disability were used for social purposes, leading to the development of 'social orthopaedics' (Borsay, 2006, p. 97f). Stiker argues that the rehabilitation movement developed after the First World War in order to find ways of making disabled former soldiers productive (Stiker, 1999, pp. 121-190). Stiker discusses how the biblical narrative understands disability. While the Old Testament tends towards exclusion, the New Testament is characterised by inclusion based on faith rather than individual characteristics (Stiker, 1999, pp. 23-38). For a thorough exploration of the biblical narratives portrayal of disability and disabled people see (Melcher, Parsons, & Yong, 2017).

Changes in society during this period have resulted in an intentional distancing of disabled people from mainstream, non-disabled society. This has occurred throughout community life: from housing, education and work, to social spaces, including churches. As a consequence, highly asymmetrical relationships between empowered non-disabled and disempowered disabled people permeated society.[246]

4.2.2 The Continuing Impact of the Individual/Medical Model of Disability

This model, arising in the eighteenth century, significantly affected the experiences of disabled people throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Although there was a significant shift in the understanding of disability during the latter part of the twentieth century, there are aspects of this model that continue to shape contemporary understandings of disability. The nature of relationships between disabled and non-disabled people has been influenced by this model well into the twenty-first century. For instance, during the current Covid-19 pandemic, vulnerable people have been defined according to a very narrow set of medical criteria.[247] This excludes many other people who are vulnerable because of the current social distancing policy operating in the UK.[248] For example, some of my friends who are blind depend on easy access to supermarket internet shopping and reliable delivery. They found it impossible to book delivery slots from mid-March. This was because supermarkets decided to limit access to delivery slots to those on the very limited list of those "people who are clinically extremely vulnerable from Covid-19". They did not qualify as 'vulnerable people'[249] according to the criteria and were therefore unable to access the restricted supermarket delivery slots. The requirement to 'social distance' made it impossible for them to shop in person. They had to rely on friends and neighbours until additional supermarket delivery slots were made available.[250]

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[246] Oliver argues that dependency of disabled people arises from industrialisation and its impacts (Oliver, 1989).
[247] The Government list was for 'people defined on medical grounds as extremely vulnerable from COVID-19'. See section 8 of current government advice at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing/staying-alert-and-safe-social-distancing#contents Accessed 12/05/2020. Current definition and guidelines are at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19 Accessed 8/12/20.
[248] A 'lockdown' where people were urged to stay at home was imposed on 20th March 2020. This meant that many disabled people have become vulnerable as a result of isolation and the insistence on keeping 2m away from other people when shopping or exercising. Such social distancing is impossible for blind and many partially sighted people to maintain.
[249] The terminology used, in error, by many supermarkets. They failed to understand that you could be disabled and not clinically vulnerable, yet need online shopping, and be clinically vulnerable but not disabled.
[250] I was also unable to access delivery slots but was able to use the local supermarkets and receive assistance from members of staff.

The idea that disability is located in an individual, directly related to illness, injury or congenital impairment, persists. This may lead to disabled people being referred to by their medical condition. For instance, I have been referred to as 'the wheelchair' by railway staff requesting platform assistance, as in, 'There's a wheelchair on its way to the platform that needs assistance.' The group of disabled people with spina bifida who were operated on by the same surgeon as I were referred to for many years as 'Mr Nash's back'.[251] This objectifies disabled people and sees the relationship with non-disabled people in terms of 'I-It' rather than 'I-Thou'.[252] The perception remains that disabled people need to be cured or healed through medical or scientific advances to make them 'normal', as does the assumption that disabled people are passive recipients of care and support from active non-disabled people.[253] The assumptions about disabled people being reliant on others has also been perpetuated by some charities, voluntary groups and other organisations run by non-disabled people for disabled people. All of these factors may reinforce the idea that disabled people must conform to the 'sick role'[254] of being a patient with an illness.[255] For example, many concessions for disabled people provide a free or discounted admission for their 'carer' rather than 'companion'.

It is hard to find positive characteristics of the Individual/Medical Model of disability within the literature. This is generally because the developing fields of research concerning disability grew out of a frustration with, and therefore opposition to, this model. It is often criticised as the source of the idea that disability is rooted by an individual's impairments, while ignoring the positive effects of appropriate treatment of these impairments.[256] In my own experience, the intervention of doctors has been essential in preventing my early death due to the side effects of my own impairment.[257] The naive criticism of the medical model

[251] See Appendix C, page 211.
[252] (Buber, 1959)
[253] (Goodley, 2010, p. 7; Jacobs, 2019, pp. 44-50, 143-174, 192-202; Swain, French, & Cameron, 2003, pp. 22-24)
[254] (Barnes & Mercer, 2010, pp. 44-45; Marks, 1999, pp. 60-62)
[255] (Marks, 1999, pp. 60-62). See (Kristiansen, Vehmas, & Shakespeare, 2009) for underlying philosophies related to disability and how disabled people are treated. (Smith, 2009) regarding philosophical understandings of both Individual/Medical and Social Models.
[256] (Marks, 1999, pp. 71-73)
[257] See Appendix C, page 211.

approach needs to be rather more nuanced than some Social Model adherents have proposed.[258]

4.3 Social Models of Disability

There are two major models of disability that are described as Social Models, one predominantly in the UK and the other in the USA, locating disability in society's attitudes towards disabled people rather than within individuals and their medically defined impairments. Within the UK, the Social Model of Disability now forms the dominant understanding of disability, while in the USA the Minority Group Model of Disability is foremost.

4.3.1 UK Social Model of Disability

The origins of the UK Social Model of Disability lie in the 1970s and 1980s with the work of a number of academics, who were themselves disabled. It is rooted within what was at that time the newly emerging field of disability sociology, together with a growing disability rights movement. From these arose a two-stage definition of impairment and disability:

> *Impairment* – Lacking part or all of a limb, or having a defective limb, organ or mechanism in the body.
>
> *Disability* – The disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes no or little account of people who have a physical impairment and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities.[259]

This two-fold definition is referred to in most UK literature as the Social Model of Disability. Tom Shakespeare refers to this as the 'Strong Social Model' to differentiate it from associated Social Models, which do not focus on individuals or impairments.[260] It has been described by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS), in the following way:

> It is society which disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments, by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and

[258] (Marks, 1999, pp. 71-72) Other characteristics and effects noted include: de-skilling disabled people; seeing disabled people as passive; labelling people into broad categories; potentially inflicting harm, not value free as claimed; intrusive; objectifying of disabled people (Marks, 1999, pp. 62-71).
[259] (Barnes & Mercer, 2010, p. 30; Johnstone, 2001, p. 14; Oliver, 1990, p. 30) both quoting (UPIAS, 1976, p. 14). (Goodley, 2017, p. 9) references the definition to Disabled People's International 1982 as source.(Disabled Peoples' International, 1982) which has slightly different wording. (Owens, 2015, p. 386f) provides a history of the various Social Models.
[260] (Shakespeare, 2013, pp. 1-2, 12; Shakespeare & Watson, 2002, pp. 11-12)

> excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group.[261]

The Social Model was deliberately intended to break the link between the individual, who lives with some level of impairment, and their experience of disability, which is the result of the attitudes and actions towards them by other people, groups, organisations and society.

Regarding my own situation under the Social Model my impairment, not being able to walk, and therefore my use of a wheelchair, is not connected to my experience of being disabled. My experience of disability arises from societal attitudes and actions towards me as a wheelchair user, excluding me from participating fully in society. This contrasts with how my disability is described in terms of the Individual/Medical Model discussed above.[262]

Rather than expecting disabled people to change, be cured or be healed in order to be included in all aspects of society, this model emphasises the need for social attitudes towards people living with impairments to change. This results in actions being taken by society that enable disabled people to be included.[263] These necessary actions range from physical access, for example the provision of physical aids such as wheelchairs and hearing aids, to the social, political and economic changes required for disabled people to actively participate rather than passively observe. This emerges from a separation of the assumed link between impairment and disability. This separation has proved advantageous, but is, however, also one of the model's major weaknesses.[264]

One of the key criticisms of the Social Model of Disability is that it either ignores or significantly downplays the real impact of impairments.[265] We cannot escape the reality that disability, while very much to do with the attitudes and actions of others, is embodied in a person. Even if all social, economic, political and physical barriers are removed, the impact of some impairments will prevent a number of disabled people from participating in some aspects of society.[266] For instance, as a wheelchair user I would never have been able to pursue a career in the front line of the police, fire or ambulance services. By tending to ignore the impact of impairments, this model risks homogenising disabled people, since

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[261] (Shakespeare, 2013, p. 12) quoting (UPIAS, 1976, p. 3).
[262] Contrast with the Individual/Medical Model of Disability understanding of my disability, on page 66 above.
[263] (Goodley, 2010, pp. 27-31)
[264] (Shakespeare & Watson, 2002) examines the strengths and weaknesses of this separation.
[265] (Hughes & Paterson, 1997; Thomas, 2014, pp. 13-15)
[266] (Johnstone, 2001, p. 21)

there is a failure to take into account the diversity of impairment and experience among disabled people.[267] In order to take into account diversity of impairment, the model would have to produce a fragmented series of minority groups.

The model is also at risk of ignoring the differences between disabled people on grounds of race, gender, or sexuality, very much in the same way as writers in other fields are at risk of ignoring disability, or using it in a negative way.[268] In addition, there are dangers of reducing disability to macro-social phenomena, which both disembodies and dislocates disabled people from their life experiences.[269] Ultimately, this dislocation of impairment and disability can sustain an unhelpful dichotomy of the two, by focusing on the latter to the exclusion of the former.[270] For example, although I may experience the same discriminatory social attitudes as other wheelchair users, how I respond is shaped by my particular limits, family and social context. When I was living in a hostel for disabled people, I was aware that other wheelchair users with similar impairments responded to social attitudes in very different ways, partly shaped by their family and school experiences.[271]

One of the responses to criticism of the 'strong' Social Model has been to suggest that its critics could benefit from greater awareness of when and how the Social Model was developed.[272] Advocates of the Social Model argue that the emphasis on social attitudes arose as an understandable reaction to the Individual/Medical Model that focused only on individuals and their impairments. According to Shakespeare, there is a lack of awareness, particularly among its most entrenched supporters, that society has changed significantly since the inception of the model. He suggests that the "… strengths of the social model are also its weaknesses."[273] In particular, the model was developed by political activists seeking to find an easily explainable alternative to the Individual/Medical Model. The context of the

[267] (Shakespeare, 2013, pp. 80-81) There is a need, however, to be careful about developing a hierarchy of disability. Reinders is concerned about this regarding physically disabled people and people with learning disabilities (Reinders, 2008, pp. 24-26). See also (Marks, 1999, pp. 115-136) for a discussion regarding the diversity of impairments among disabled people. On the other hand, Block suggests all disabled people 'have equal standing within the disability rights movement.' (Block, 2002, p. 54)
[268] (Marks, 1999, pp. 89-94)
[269] (Gleeson, 1999, pp. 19-22) argues that the Social Model has a tendency to ignore history. He also critiques the underpinning philosophies of the Social Models, raising concerns about structuralist, humanist, idealist and normalisation approaches.
[270] (Shakespeare & Watson, 2002, pp. 8, 10, 15-19)
[271] See Appendix C page 214.
[272] (Barnes, 1998, pp. 76-77)
[273] (Shakespeare, 2013, p. 20)

social model was identity politics, enabling disabled people to campaign for social change without "… feeling ashamed of impairments… [as] activists could deny that impairment was relevant to their situation." While Shakespeare contends that the social model has not changed since its inception, I think that the interdisciplinary field of disability studies has broadened our understanding of what informs an understanding of disability. The experiences of a younger generation of both campaigners and academics have shaped their understanding and concerns. Some proponents of the Social Model are very dismissive of the criticisms without engaging with them fully.[274]

In my view, the 'Strong Social Model' has achieved a significant change in the way disability is understood, by shifting the focus from the individual to social attitudes and actions. However, by focusing so much on society and barrier removal, it has done little to facilitate the development of inclusive and empowering relationships between disabled and non-disabled people.

One of the important outcomes of the Social Model of Disability was the Disability Discrimination Act (1995), later superseded by the Equality Act (2010). Although these pieces of legislation have afforded some degree of protection to disabled people, the definitions of 'disability' have not changed, and are still given in terms of individual impairments. According to these Acts

> You're disabled … if you have a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities.[275]

Both pieces of legislation also refer to 'reasonable adjustments' being made to enable disabled people to access work and have access to services, but this has been difficult to define clearly. Austerity measures, leading to severe budget cuts at both national and local

[274] (Oliver, 2009, pp. 48-51) dismisses five main criticisms of the Social Model within three pages. The criticisms identified are that the Social Model: does not adequately deal with realities of impairment; does not deal with subjective experience of 'pain' of impairment and disability; does not incorporate other social divisions such as race, gender, ageing etc.; does not address the concept of 'otherness'; is an inadequate social theory of disablement. The emergence of interdisciplinary disability studies has enabled some of these criticisms to be addressed since Mike Oliver wrote his cursory defence.

[275] Both acts use the same definition: Disability Discrimination Act (2005) definition http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1995/50 Accessed 18/8/2019 and Equality Act (2010) definition https://www.gov.uk/definition-of-disability-under-equality-act-2010 Accessed 18/8/2019

government levels, have made the implementation and enforcement of the legislation even more problematic.[276]

4.3.2 USA Minority Group Model of Disability

Although writers in the USA often use the term 'Social Model of Disability' there are many occasions when the model that is being used is actually something called the Minority Group Model of Disability.[277] This model is mentioned in passing by several UK writers within the sociology of disability.[278] The clearest definition, however, is given by Nancy Eiesland, and provides the framework for her theological approach to disability.[279]

Disabled people seen as a minority group are understood to be:

> … a group of people, who because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination.[280]

This clearly moves the understanding of disability away from the Individual/Medical Model and identifies disability as a result of attitudes and actions by the majority, non-disabled group, which discriminate against members of the minority disabled group.[281] This model has close links with various rights-based models that emerged in the USA during the 1960s and 1970s.[282] It has been a productive model within the USA, the most significant outcome being the Americans with Disabilities Act (1990).[283] One of the reasons that this legislation

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[276] (Ryan, 2019) provides a wide-ranging analysis of the direct effects of austerity. (M. Cross, 2013) examines the impact of the move from Disability Living Allowance to Personal Independence Payments and the accompanying significant reduction in the number of people who qualify for these payments. (Briant, Watson, & Philo, 2011; Briant et al., 2013) discusses how disabled people are increasingly portrayed in a negative light when falsely linked to reliance on benefits.

[277] (Barnes & Mercer, 2010, pp. 2-3, 7, 26-28; Barnes, Oliver, & Barton, 2002, pp. 171-172; Goodley, 2010, pp. 12-14; 2017, pp. 13-14; Shakespeare, 2006, pp. 23-25; 2013, pp. 94, 103). (Hahn, 2002) identifies himself as proposing the Minority Group Model of Disability. (Eiesland, 1994, pp. 62-66) footnotes him among several contributors. Hauerwas identifies Gliedman and Roth's 1979 *The Unexpected Minority* as the instigators (Hauerwas, 1986/2004b, p. 170). (Hickman, 2018, p. 244) confuses the two, suggesting that the Social Model and Minority Group Model are different names for the same model.

[278] The model is discussed by (Albrecht, Albrecht, Seelman, & Bury, 2001, pp. 125, 134-136, 156, 319, 556, 576-577; Barnes & Mercer, 2010, pp. 2-3, 7, 26-28; Barnes et al., 2002, pp. 171-172; Goodley, 2010, pp. 12-14; 2017, pp. 13-14; Hahn, 1993; Shakespeare, 2006, pp. 23-25; 2013, pp. 94, 103).

[279] Eiesland's theological approach to disability is discussed on page 91. (Creamer, 2009, pp. 25-26) briefly discusses the development of the minority group model.

[280] (Eiesland, 1994, p. 63)

[281] A minority is understood in terms of power that a majority group exerts over a minority group. In South Africa under apartheid the black numerical majority were a minority group in terms of power and rights.

[282] (Eiesland, 1994, pp. 53-57; Johnstone, 2001, pp. 22-24)

[283] (Swinton, 2011, p. 280)

has been effective is the inclusion of a clause which linked its implementation to sources of federal funding.[284] In the UK, the enforcement of discrimination legislation has largely been through legal action brought by individuals, charities and the Equality Commission.

While there are many similarities to the UK Social Model, there are differences too.[285] The USA model requires the difference between disabled and non-disabled people to be maintained. This is problematic when seeking to foster inclusive relationships between disabled and non-disabled people. If disabled and non-disabled people see each other and themselves as members of discrete groups, then this hinders all but the most intentional attempts at building inclusive relationships.

4.3.3 Other Social Models

There are a number of other models of disability that can be grouped together within the broad family of Social Models, and they all shift the focus away from the individual and/or impairment, towards society.

Within the USA and Canada, alongside the Minority Group Model of Disability, there is another approach which focuses on how culture has shaped our understanding of disability, referred to as the 'Cultural Model of Disability'. It examines how culture portrays notions of disability in the media, film, theatre, literature and so on.[286] In Scandinavian countries a Relational Model of Disability has been developed during recent years. This addresses the relationship between disability and impairment rather than relationships between people.[287] In the UK an 'Affirmative Model of Disability' seeks to see impairment as part of the expected range of embodiment within human beings, and as such disabled people live fulfilled and valuable lives.[288] This model seeks to enable disabled people to see their lives in

[284] (Hahn, 2002, p. 165)
[285] (Waldschmidt, 2017, p. 21) minimises the differences between the social and minority group models. (Goodley, 2017, pp. 13-16) emphasises the differences, while recognising the similarities.
[286] A cultural model is used by (Lewis, 2007, pp. 31-36) and outlined by (Waldschmidt, 2017, pp. 22-24). For summary of a cultural model see (Goodley, 2017, pp. 13-16). (Shakespeare, 2013, pp. 47-71) is very critical of cultural models of disability.
[287] (Goodley, 2010, pp. 14-18) This model does not address interpersonal relationships such as friendship. See (Bjoernaas, 2018) for a description and application of the 'Nordic Relational Model'. See (Shakespeare, 2013, pp. 72-91) on critical realist approach. (Goodley & Runswick-Cole, 2012) and (Shakespeare, 2005).
[288] (C. Cameron, 2014) His work is based on the foundation laid by (Swain & French, 2000). There are links between this approach and the limits approach proposed by Beth Creamer, see Chapter 5, page 103.

a positive way, although like the other models identified here, it does little to directly address interpersonal relationships between disabled and non-disabled people.

4.4 Beyond the Social Models

While the Individual/Medical Model has focused attention on disabled people as individuals, the Social Models have turned attention to the attitudes of society towards disabled people. In the late twentieth and now the twenty-first centuries, the focus has begun to move to a more balanced perspective between individuals and society.

Tom Shakespeare identified one of these approaches as 'critical realist'.[289] He utilises this in his 'interactional approach', to recognise the need for a multi-faceted way of exploring the wide range of factors that shape our understanding of disability and its implications.[290] This approach enables us to address the distinction between impairment and disability inherent in earlier Social Models, and therefore address the complex nature of interactions between individuals, impairments and society.[291]

Rather than understanding disability as being located in either the individual or society, Shakespeare defines disability as:

> … the outcome of the interaction between individual and contextual factors, which includes impairment, personality, individual attitudes, environment, policy and culture.[292]

He thus differentiates his critical realist position from both the Individual/Medical and Social Models of Disability. This enables a wide range of factors which shape the nature of disability to be taken into account: physical, biological, psychological, psychosocial and emotional, socio-economic, cultural and normative.[293] To this should be added theological factors, which are generally ignored within the sociology of disability.[294]

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[289] (Marks, 1999, pp. 7, 137f) adopts this approach when discussing the impact of language. (Goodley, 2013) discusses 'critical disability studies' referencing (Shakespeare, 2006, 2013). The history and nature of critical disability studies is helpfully discussed by Rosemary Garland-Thomson (Garland-Thomson, 2017).

[290] (Shakespeare, 2006, pp. 55-67; 2013, pp. 72-91) See also a short critique of 'realist' approach in (Reinders, 2008, pp. 68-73).

[291] (Gorski, 2013; Owens, 2015) describe critical realism and see it as helpful in the light of critique of the Social Model. (Goodley, Lawthom, Liddiard, & Runswick-Cole, 2019) reflect on critical disability studies.

[292] (Shakespeare, 2013, p. 77)

[293] (Shakespeare, 2013, p. 74)

[294] The specific interaction between individuals and theological perspectives is explored in the next chapter.

Shakespeare wants to distance his position from the relational model proposed in two articles by Carol Thomas.[295] This difference arises because she understands 'relational' in terms of social relationships between disabled and non-disabled people, while he is concerned about the relationship "… between intrinsic factors (impairments, personality, motivation, etc.) and extrinsic factors (environments, support systems, oppression, etc.)"[296] My own view is that, if disability is an interaction between individuals and their contexts, the relationships disabled people have with both disabled and non-disabled people will be one of the factors shaping their experience of disability. Shakespeare is rightly cautious about using the word oppression in connection with disability, because disabled people do not all experience oppression. Disabled people may experience a different, less mutual, relationship with non-disabled people than non-disabled people experience with one another. It is certainly my experience that I have rarely if ever been oppressed, even though I am aware that non-disabled people sometimes respond to me in ways that directly relate to the presence of my wheelchair.

Such an interactional approach offers a way of addressing negative attitudes towards impairment expressed when people acquire a significant impairment through accident or illness, which changes their whole experience of life. When viewed through the lens of the Individual/Medical Model's negative view of impairment, this is sometimes understood as being tragic, to the extent that some people with acquired disabilities even seek assisted suicide. The Social Model's neglect of the impact of such impairments fails to address these issues, while the interaction approach may enable people to "… capture the fact that impairment may not be neutral, but neither is it all-defining and terrible."[297] By including interpersonal relationships among the factors addressed by an interactional approach, and by encouraging inclusive relationships between disabled and non-disabled people, the attitudes and assumptions about impairment may begin to be addressed.

4.5 Interim Conclusion

The Individual/Medical Model of Disability portrayed disability in terms of individual impairments. This model intentionally restricted disabled people's participation in various aspects of society, especially in the context of a dramatic growth in industrialisation. This in

[295] (Thomas, 2007, 2014)
[296] (Shakespeare, 2013, p. 76)
[297] (Shakespeare, 2013, p. 85)

turn led to the isolation of disabled people in various institutions. At the same time, medical science was used to categorise disabled people and find ways to cure or otherwise rehabilitate them into society. This model of disability denied mutuality between disabled and non-disabled people. The impact of this approach was challenged in the last quarter of the twentieth century, but the individual/medical understanding of disability still shapes many disabled people's experience of exclusion and inclusion in society in negative ways.

The development of various Social Models of Disability focuses attention away from individuals and their impairments and towards the attitudes and actions of society towards people with impairments. It was assumed by proponents that, by changing these attitudes and actions, physical and social barriers would be removed and the exclusion, oppression and discrimination that disabled people experience would be addressed. Disabled people would then be able to participate fully in all aspects of society. It has become clear that, although the Social Models were able to address many of the barriers and attitudes that disabled people experienced, they failed to acknowledge that impairments and other factors shaped the experience of inclusion or exclusion from society. This approach gave rise to a focus on the generalised inclusion of disabled people which ignored the context and experience of particular individuals.

The use of critical realist approaches, such as Tom Shakespeare's interactive approach, consider the multiple factors that shape people's experience of living with impairments. These approaches enable interaction with various contexts and factors to shape an experience of exclusion or inclusion in positive ways. Such an approach can enable an exploration of relationships, including friendships, between disabled and non-disabled people.

Chapter 5 Disability and Theology

5.1 Introduction

This chapter surveys a number of theological approaches to disability. These influence contemporary understandings of disability, the nature of relationships between disabled and non-disabled people and, most significantly, the relationship between disabled people and the Christian concept of God as Trinity.[298] I outline key features, weaknesses and strengths of these various theological approaches to disability.

I am concerned that while each of these theological approaches to disability identifies and addresses some specific barriers to the inclusion of disabled people, they tend to portray the relationship between disabled and non-disabled people in broad and generalised terms. Where specific relationships are identified they are often used as examples or illustrations of relationships between disabled and non-disabled people. They are then applied to general relationships between non-disabled people and both people with learning disabilities and people with physical disabilities.[299] These theological approaches are not particularly effective in fostering relationships that enable the participatory inclusion of disabled people. I suggest that friendship, properly understood, has the potential to effectively foster participatory inclusion.

5.2 The Emergence of Disability Theology

John Swinton[300] has been a major contributor to recent theological debate around issues of disability. He writes:

> Disability theology is the attempt by disabled and non-disabled Christians to understand and interpret the gospel of Jesus Christ, God, and humanity against the backdrop of the historical and contemporary experiences of people with disabilities. It has come to refer to a variety of perspectives and methods designed to give voice to the rich and diverse theological meanings of the human experience of disability.[301]

[298] The importance of the relational nature of the Trinity is developed Chapter 6.
[299] For instance, the relationships between Henri Nouwen and his friend Adam, Hans Reinders and his friend Ronald, Brian Brock and his son Adam and Frances Young and her son Arthur. These are relationships with people with learning disabilities rather than people with physical disabilities.
[300] Writing as a non-disabled academic, with a background as a mental health nurse and a hospital mental health chaplain.
[301] (Swinton, 2011, p. 274) quoting from Swinton, 'Disability Theology,' in: Ian McFarland, David Fergusson, Karen Kilby, and Iain Torrance (eds.), Cambridge Dictionary of Christian Theology, London (Cambridge University Press) 2010.

The presence of disabled people in the Bible has been widely recognised.[302] It is only with the emergence of a new interest in theologies of disability in the latter decades of the twentieth century that this has become a focus for debate. The first coherent explorations of disability and theology focused mainly on people with learning disabilities, with the foundational work and writing of Jean Vanier, Stanley Hauerwas, Henri Nouwen and, more recently, Hans Reinders.[303] Serious exploration of theology regarding people with physical disabilities is often associated with the publication of Nancy Eiesland's much cited book, *The Disabled God*[304] in 1994. Since the publication of Eiesland's book, the field has rapidly grown and today reaches across a range of theological backgrounds and disciplines.[305]

John Hull, writing in *Disability: The Inclusive Church Resource,*[306] provides a helpful approach to understanding the relationships between disability theology and the wider theological context. He provides a theological map of branches, genres and frontiers.[307] The branches represent the major themes of Christian theology: beliefs about God, Jesus Christ, human destiny, and so on. The genres are the variety of approaches to theology provided by , for example, liberation, feminist, and black theologies. Frontiers are the ways in which "… Christian faith seeks to interpret some area of human life which lies outside Christian faith, or which seems at first sight to lie outside. Examples might be theologies of money, of film, of history and so on."[308] I believe Hull's approach is vital for avoiding the risk of either pigeon-holing disability theology within one aspect of theological reflection and exploration, or dissecting disability theology into distinct sections which become isolated from each other and the whole. Hull's approach has echoes of the disability studies approach briefly discussed in the previous chapter. The interdisciplinary approach of disability studies enables disability to be understood as a network of many different perspectives rather than within distinct disciplines. This approach also reinforces the mutual relationship between disability

[302] (Brock & Swinton, 2012; Creamer, 2013; Deuel, 2013; Hickman, 2018, p. 153f; Melcher et al., 2017)
[303] Regarding Vanier's wide-ranging bibliography see Reinders's chapter 'Being with the Disabled: Jean Vanier's Theological Realism', in (Brock & Swinton, 2012, pp. 467-511). Hauerwas's *Suffering Presence* (Hauerwas, S. (1986). Suffering presence : theological reflections on medicine, the mentally handicapped, and the church. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press) is acknowledged as significant. Nouwen's *Adam: God's Beloved* (Nouwen, H. J. (2012). Adam: God's beloved: Orbis Books) is a significant contribution. Reinders *Receiving the Gift of Friendship*, for example, refers to a selection of the writings of Vanier and Nouwen, and makes extensive use of Hauerwas (Reinders, 2008).
[304] (Eiesland, 1994)
[305] (Hickman, 2018, pp. 185-215; Swinton, 2011, p. 275)
[306] (Hull, 2014) Writing as an academic theologian who has become blind.
[307] (Hull, 2014, p. 53f)
[308] (Hull, 2014, p. 54)

theology and the wider theological context. Indeed, since disability theology is understood to be included within disability studies, this approach enables interconnections within the wider context to be explored.

5.3 Survey of Disability Theology Approaches

Since the publication of Nancy Eiesland's *Disabled God,* there has been a steadily growing body of work addressing theologies of disability. These include, but are not limited to: Kathy Black's *A Healing Homiletic*,[309] Jennie Block's *Copious Hosting*,[310] Reynolds's *Vulnerable Communion*,[311]and Deborah Beth Creamer's *Disability and Christian Theology.*[312] Each of these authors plays a part in shaping contemporary understandings of disability and disabled people, and I will explore the achievements, advantages and limitations of each in turn.[313] While there are some common features, there are also distinctive elements discussed below.[314] Of those approaches that rely on disability studies, Swinton writes:

> Whilst there may be differences between the UK and the US approaches, at heart the assumptions within the Disability Studies approach are very similar: *disability is the product of malignant social practices which require social, cultural and political change rather than simply the rehabilitation of individuals. Within this perspective disability is not something that one has; rather it is something that one is given or has bestowed upon one in and through the relationships and practices of one's community*.[315]

This demonstrates very clearly the shift from the Individual/Medical Model of Disability towards the adoption of the Social Models of Disability, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Some approaches to the development of theologies of disability rely heavily on disability studies, yet others are highly critical. The range of the material surveyed below shows that

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[309] (Black, 1996)
[310] (Block, 2002)
[311] (Reynolds, 2008)
[312] (Creamer, 2009) A later essay by Creamer identifies four models of disability (moral, medical, social and limits) and examines how they relate to understanding and practices regarding disabled people (Creamer, 2012a).
[313] Swinton suggests that a disability studies-based approach tends to be taken by those who are trained in other fields first and in theology second (Swinton, 2011, p. 283) noting that this results in images of God as disabled, accessible, limited. (Reinders, 2008, p. 164ff) focuses on Theologies of Liberation (Eiesland) and Access (Block) from this group.
[314] The common features are: setting out a history of disability rights; locating the origins of exclusion and/or oppression of disabled people in either the Individual/Medical or Social Models of Disability; declaring their own disability or close acquaintance with disabled people (although this is not exclusive to this approach, for instance David Pailin's approach was initiated by the birth of a relative with severe developmental disabilities); arguing for equivalent rights to be recognised by both secular society and church communities.
[315] (Swinton, 2011, pp. 280-281) italics original.

the perspectives are not clearly divided into those who are for and those who are against such approaches.[316] In the following sections, I shall attempt to indicate the extent to which particular authors relate to disability studies foundations, and where they take a different approach.

5.3.1 Foundations

As noted above, the emergence of disability theology has often been associated with Eiesland's *The Disabled God* in 1994. Prior to this, there had been significant work focusing on a faith-based understanding of people with learning disabilities, notably the theologian Stanley Hauerwas. I want to briefly outline some key aspects of Hauerwas's large body of work, utilising Swinton's *Critical Reflections on Stanley Hauerwas' Theology of Disability*[317], and Hans Reinders's critique of Hauerwas in *Receiving the Gift of Friendship*.[318]

One of the major themes that runs through Hauerwas's work is the influence of society in general, and communities of faith in particular, on our understanding of and relationship with people with learning disabilities.[319] Other discernible themes are: the nature of suffering; the use of language concerning disability and disabled people; the related issue of 'them' and 'us'; and whether a writer is an 'insider' or 'outsider'.[320] Hauerwas explicitly identifies himself as an 'outsider': that is to say, someone with no direct experience of living or working with people with learning disabilities.[321] I return to this issue below. Hans Reinders, while agreeing with Hauerwas on the importance of community, is critical of Hauerwas's continued use of a 'them and us' approach. Critiquing *Suffering the Retarded,*

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[316] Those that make use of disability sociology and/or disability studies are Eiesland's *Disabled God*, Jennie Block's *Copious Hosting* and Jacobs's *The Upside-down Kingdom of God*. Others make some use of these approaches: Black's *A Healing Homiletic*, Reynold's *A Vulnerable God*. Lewis's *Deaf Liberation Theology* considers them secondary sources. Hauerwas and Pailin do not make any reference to these approaches, partly because they were writing while disability studies was emerging as a coherent discipline. Reinders is critical of the use of disability sociology and disability studies on the grounds that they exclude people with learning disabilities.

[317] (Swinton, 2004)

[318] (Reinders, 2008)

[319] (Swinton, 2004, pp. 6-7)

[320] (Reinders, 2008, p. 195f) identifies Hauerwas's theme of challenging the assumption that disabled people suffer, particularly in *Suffering Presence* (Hauerwas, 1986/2004a, 1986/2004c). Issues of the language that Hauerwas uses are raised by Swinton in his introduction (Swinton, 2004, p. 8) and critiqued by O'Brien, who identifies the impact of labelling people with the terminology 'the retarded' (O'Brien, 2004, p. 46). The tension between 'them' and 'us', being an 'insider' or an 'outsider', and whether one speaks 'for' or 'with' disabled people is a recurrent theme (Hauerwas, 1977/2004a, 1986/2004a; 1986/2004c, pp. 101-106; 1994/2004; Reinders, 2008, pp. 203-206; Swinton, 2004, pp. 7-8).

[321] (Hauerwas, 1986/2004a, pp. 38-43)

Reinders is concerned whether the distinction between 'them' and 'us' is "… only a question of language."[322] He writes: "His [Hauerwas's] claim that in the face of the 'retarded' we have an opportunity to see God comes close to substituting 'God' for 'them', which may explain why Hauerwas may think there is a remaining distance."[323] Reinders suggests that there is a real tension in Hauerwas's writing between seeking to be with people with learning disabilities and at the same time recognising the differences between disabled and non-disabled people. This highlights the serious difficulty of seeking to be with, at the same time as writing about, disabled people.[324] Hauerwas is also concerned about the way that pre-natal testing shapes and reflects problematic attitudes towards disabled people. There is a range of assumptions about disabled people being less able, less gifted and more reliant on others that shape the use of pre-natal testing, with abortion being presented as an appropriate response to the detection of an impairment.[325] A detailed examination of the impact of pre-natal testing is, however, beyond the scope of this thesis.[326] I shall return to Hauerwas on the theme of suffering in Chapter 6.[327]

Although Hauerwas is concerned with issues facing people with learning disabilities, his focus is on the relational nature of all human beings, disabled and non-disabled, rather than on the particular status of disabled people.[328] This leads him to an examination of the characteristics of communities that welcome and include disabled people. He identifies the L'Arche communities, founded by Jean Vanier, as a paradigmatic example of inclusive communities.[329] Hospitality and friendship between disabled and non-disabled people are both key aspects of L'Arche communities, with an emphasis on being *with* one another

[322] (Reinders, 2008, p. 202)
[323] (Reinders, 2008, p. 202)
[324] (Reinders, 2008, pp. 203-205)
[325] These are explored from a personal perspective by Brian and Stephanie Brock (Brock & Brock, 2007).
[326] Hauerwas only mentions amniocentesis testing (Hauerwas, 1977/2004b, p. 136; 1986/2004b, p. 175; 1994/2004, p. 54). There are now many different forms of pre-natal testing and in recent years the development of pre-implantation genetic testing. The outcome of such testing is usually the abortion of a foetus where significant disability is detected or assumed. For a discussion of these issues see (Peat, 2013; Swinton & Brock, 2007). Peter Singer has been a strident proponent of the active euthanasia of disabled babies (Singer & Kuhse, 1985). Garland-Thomson has recently argued that '"Worse off" is the unexamined assumption about disabled lives that grounds Singer's utilitarian logic for euthanizing disabled new-borns.' (Garland-Thomson, 2015, p. 303). Elsewhere she suggests that the belief that disability disqualifies people from participation in society is rooted in a eugenic desire to eliminate disability. To counter this she presents 'a reading of disability as a potentially generative resource rather than unequivocally restrictive liability.' (Garland-Thomson, 2012, p. 339)
[327] On pages 133f.
[328] (Hauerwas, 1975/2004; 1999/2004, p. 16)
[329] (Hauerwas, 1999/2004, pp. 21-24)

rather than non-disabled people caring *for* disabled people. In a response to Hauerwas's paper, Vanier explores the issue of human need. Vanier draws on work by Michael Ignatieff to suggest two different kinds of need: basic needs of food, lodging and education and deeper needs of love, respect, dignity and friendship.[330] He suggests that, while legislation can address the former, only friendship in community can enable all of the latter to be met. Building on Vanier's analysis of a division of needs, I suggest that faith communities are also able to meet the full range of needs through their fostering of inclusive relationships.[331]

Hauerwas further discusses the nature of community by asking the question, 'what is normal?' He suggests that the idea of a common norm for society is destructive to the sort of communities he would hope churches could be. He goes so far as to say that he considers that the 'principle of normalization' means that, "… the demand to be normal can be tyrannical unless we understand that the normal condition of our being together is that we are all different."[332] Instead, he suggests, communities should respect diversity, and recognise what he terms 'the gift of difference'.[333] Tom Reynolds critiques the idea of 'norms' from a different point of view, and I shall return to his argument below. I agree with John O'Brien's criticism, that the argument for diversity is weakened by Hauerwas's positioning of himself as an 'outsider'.[334] Given the call to inclusive communities of non-disabled people and people with learning disabilities, the force of Hauerwas's argument is reduced by placing of himself outside the community. The contrast with being an 'insider', those who live or and work with people with learning disabilities, is emphasised when Hauerwas finds himself addressing a group of parents of children with learning disabilities.[335] Hauerwas says that he "… has no right to be heard by you [parents of children with learning disabilities] … you have felt the sadness, suffering, and joy of being, having and working with retarded (*sic*) citizens that I have not."[336] O'Brien points out that Hauerwas is inconsistent in his use of pronouns, shifting between 'you' and 'us'. This suggests that Hauerwas "… slips from his outside status."[337] Furthermore, there are concerns about whether Hauerwas is

[330] (Vanier, 2004, p. 28)
[331] (Hauerwas, 2004, p. 196)
[332] (Hauerwas, 1986/2004a, p. 40)
[333] (Hauerwas, 1986/2004a, p. 40)
[334] (O'Brien, 2004, p. 41)
[335] (Hauerwas, 1986/2004a, p. 38)
[336] (Hauerwas, 1986/2004a, p. 38)
[337] (O'Brien, 2004, p. 48)

excluding people with intellectual disabilities, even when he uses 'us', to identify with his audience of parents of people with learning disabilities, and whether he is failing to encourage the expansion of those who are 'being with' people with learning disabilities.[338] I think this is confusing for readers of the printed article who are trying to understand to what extent they are 'outsiders' or 'insiders'. In chapter 6 I reflect on similar issues, whether I see myself as a non-disabled person sitting down and whether I am an 'insider' or 'outsider' when talking to churches about the inclusion of disabled people in churches.[339]

An important perspective on the nature of inclusive community is revealed by considering the relationships between parents and their disabled children. Hauerwas is rightly concerned that this relationship is increasingly being shaped by how children in general are understood in the role of consumers. He suggests that it is important to see children as gifts rather than commodities or possessions.[340] If children are seen as commodities or possessions, then disabled children are problematised and the solution is taken to be the removal of disability through placing them in institutions or, increasingly, through a pre-natal test, such as amniocentesis.[341] This approach exacerbates problems for disabled people, who are excluded and alienated, "… since on the whole this society has already decided that such 'unfortunate accidents' should not exist."[342] Hauerwas is convinced of the 'expressivist' argument that selective abortion following pre-natal diagnosis is problematic since it expresses discriminatory attitudes towards disabled people. Hoffman is, however, dubious of the emphasis Hauerwas places on this.[343] False attempts at 'solving the problem' of disabled people through abortion only leads to repercussions for people who have become disabled through illness, accident or the effects of ageing. These repercussions include restricting support for and negative attitudes towards disabled people. As a disabled person I am very concerned about whether I am valued and empowered by those who argue for the termination of all disabled babies yet suggest I am able to participate fully in society.

[338] (O'Brien, 2004, pp. 48-49) O'Brien also thinks that Hauerwas's positioning himself as an 'outsider' "… names a distance between himself and 'the retarded'" (O'Brien, 2004, p. 47).
[339] See pages 143 and 145
[340] (Hauerwas, 1994/2004)
[341] (Hauerwas, 1994/2004, p. 54)
[342] (Hauerwas, 1994/2004, p. 55)
[343] (Hofmann, 2017) for a discussion of the arguments for and against the expressivist argument.

Hauerwas argues that the inclusion of disabled people is a matter of responsibility not only for families with disabled children, but for the community. He suggests that families with disabled children can helpfully challenge the imagination of faith communities, saying that "… imagination is a pattern of possibilities fostered within a community by the stories and correlative commitments that make it what it is."[344] Hauerwas also recognises that our imagination can be restricted by many factors. If it is grounded in "… both the story of who God has called us to be, and our concrete attempts to faithfully embody that calling …", then the presence of people with learning disabilities can help us to imagine "… that the world is different from what it seems."[345]

There may be a risk of presenting an unrealistic picture of the present Christian community. We can easily underestimate the difference between what the church currently is, and what the church is called to be. The potential for the presence of people with learning disabilities to transform a community can be lost, for instance, if churches place too much emphasis on 'belief' and an understanding of doctrine. In such contexts people with learning disabilities are more likely to be marginalised, and their presence is less likely to bring about transformation.[346]

The transformative presence of people with learning disabilities can also be restricted if the narratives about them are not understood or are ignored.[347] Jeff McNair goes so far as to say that a Christian imagined idea about who disabled people are may be "… what is keeping the church from acting responsibly towards people with disabilities."[348] In other words, the impoverished imagination of the present church may be the problem rather than the solution, especially if their imagination has become distorted by assumptions about disabled people. Therefore "… the church rejects, fears, or is disinterested in who they imagine persons with mental retardation (*sic*) to be. They imagine them as children, not adults."[349] It is not 'Christian imagination' as such that is the problem, but a distorted imagination that is not informed by the narratives of, and relationships with, actual disabled people. Hauerwas fully recognises the limits of our impoverished imagination and argues that Christian

[344] (Hauerwas, 1994/2004)
[345] (Hauerwas, 1994/2004, p. 56)
[346] (Hauerwas, 1994/2004, pp. 59-60)
[347] (McNair, 2004, p. 65)
[348] (McNair, 2004, p. 65)
[349] (McNair, 2004, p. 65)

imagination should be ordered "… by the story of who God called us to be and our concrete attempts to faithfully embody that calling."[350] McNair, in a response to Hauerwas, suggests that "… individuals with disabilities should be integrated into the community as if their disability was as irrelevant a characteristic as hair colour or state of origin."[351] He concludes that "… people with disabilities are not that different from persons without disabilities."[352] While I agree that disabled people should be integrated into church communities, the danger of treating impairments and diversity in this way is that we might overlook the real impact that such impairments can have.

Despite these criticisms, and the changes in the way that disability has been understood since Hauerwas was writing, it is still important that, as Hauerwas says, the church:

> … must be a community with the patience, amid the division and hatreds of this world, to take the time to nurture friendships, to serve the neighbor (*sic*), and to give and receive the thousand small acts of care that ultimately are the heart blood of the Kingdom.[353]

In the light of a call for church communities to foster friendships with disabled people and their families, it is clear that Hauerwas's approach sees such relationships as being particular rather than general. His approach is, therefore, an exception to my critique of other similar approaches to 'general relationships' that I made in the introduction to this chapter.

5.3.2 A Gentle Touch

An early attempt at developing a theology of disability was that of David Pailin in *A Gentle Touch*.[354] Pailin does not draw on sociological or liberation resources, but ideas originating in 'process philosophy' instead. Although his enquiry addresses more generally what it means to be human, rather than specifically what it means to be disabled, his book was a response to an encounter with Alex, a baby with profound disabilities who had died in infancy.[355] He recognises that, "… every person is to some extent limited, restricted and finite. This is what it is to be human rather than divine."[356] Pailin's view of salvation, it appears, changed as a

[350] (Hauerwas, 1994/2004, p. 56)
[351] (McNair, 2004, p. 68)
[352] (McNair, 2004, p. 69)
[353] (Hauerwas, 1985/2004, p. 76)
[354] (Pailin, 1992)
[355] Writing as a non-disabled academic whose perspective on disability is abruptly challenged by meeting Alex, although Pailin's relationship to Alex is unclear (Pailin, 1992, pp. 1-14).
[356] (Pailin, 1992, p. 59) The idea of humans having limits, rather than being limited, is developed by Beth Creamer, discussed below (Creamer, 2009).

result of this encounter: from being related to worth and the significance of what we achieve, to a focus on the significance of being loved, both by God and by other people.[357]

In reviewing Pailin's book, Hauerwas suggests that Pailin is challenging theologies of disability which are questionable in themselves, such as equating disability and sin, or as a test of character, or seeing disability as a mystery.[358] The lack of Christology, or indeed enquiry in the Trinitarian idea of God, troubled Hauerwas. More positively, however, Hauerwas does credit Pailin with arguing "… against those that justify the existence of the handicapped on the grounds that they provide the opportunity for making us better through learning to care for them."[359] If all there is for severely disabled people is the love of other people, even unconditional love, without any sign of transformation then this approach does indeed seem fruitless. I also think that another weakness in Pailin's approach is his underlying assumption that disability and impairment are only characteristics of individuals.[360] This would align him with Individual/Medical Models of Disability, which had already been challenged by Social Models at the time of his publication.

Hans Reinders's recent critique of Pailin's work points out its minimal impact on subsequent theologies of disability.[361] Reinders says:

> … the worth of any human being is neither instrumental nor intrinsically but always extrinsically grounded, not in the value they have for others, nor in a quality they have in themselves, but in the love of God.[362]

Reinders remains at odds, however, with Pailin's "… conception of the human good in which the importance of what he [Pailin] calls 'freely creative' agency looms large."[363] Reinders suggests that the problem lies in Pailin's 'abstract' concept of God as the ultimate consummation of all being.[364]

Pailin finds his own problems with liberation theology, and with minority group approaches. He sharply critiques the idea of a 'normal' human being. A significant strength is his

[357] (Pailin, 1992, pp. 1-14)
[358] (Hauerwas, 1993, p. 99; Pailin, 1992, p. 66f)
[359] (Hauerwas, 1993, p. 99)
[360] (Pailin, 1992, pp. 38-65)
[361] (Reinders, 2008, pp. 206-226)
[362] (Reinders, 2008, p. 220)
[363] (Reinders, 2008, p. 221)
[364] (Reinders, 2008, p. 223)

argument that disability is not the will of God, which challenges the idea that disability is related to sin, character or mystery.[365] He also argues that the worth of all human beings, not just disabled people, has to be based upon extrinsic rather than merely intrinsic characteristics. The task, then, becomes how to define such extrinsic grounding.

The strength of Pailin's contribution is the case he makes for the worth of every human being not to be measured in terms of their ability or inability, achievements or failures, or indeed any other intrinsic characteristics. The worth and value of all human beings is extrinsically grounded in the love of God, in whose image they are made.[366] In Chapter 6, I follow this up by exploring how God includes us in a covenant relationship with Godself and all creation, a covenant in which we all participate together. This will then provide the foundation for encouraging the fostering of friendships between God, disabled and non-disabled people, which I develop further in Chapter 7.

5.3.3 Disabled God

The aim of Nancy Eiesland's *The Disabled* God[367] is to encourage churches to be more welcoming of and more accessible to disabled people. She argues that this can be achieved through the use of transforming images and practices within the church.[368] Her work is firmly grounded in the Minority Group Model of Disability, and also in a liberation theology framework. For Eiesland, the central transformed and transformative image is the 'disabled God'.[369]

Eiesland's metaphor of the 'disabled God' draws its power from the tension that arises when the concept of 'disability' comes into contact with traditional concepts of 'God'.[370] She uses the idea that the 'risen body' of Christ still bears the marks of crucifixion. This deconstructs the idea that Jesus personifies the image of a perfect body, and that God works only through the exercise of coercive power. These are ideas that have underpinned many of the ways that disabled people have been excluded from the church. In particular, Eiesland identifies

[365] (Pailin, 1992, pp. 66-91)
[366] (Reinders, 2008, pp. 210-212)
[367] (Eiesland, 1994) writing as a disabled person who has been active in disability rights and trained initially as a sociologist before studying theology.
[368] (Eiesland, 1994, pp. 24, 69-70, 107-119)
[369] (Eiesland, 1994, pp. 89-106) Hans Reinders is critical of the move from Minority Group Model to theology, from experience mediated through a model to a theology of church (Reinders, 2008, pp. 165-167).
[370] See, for example, (Wren, 1989, p. 123f) discussed on page 51.

the following: associating disability with sin or virtuous suffering; assuming disabled people are in need of charity; problematic readings of healing miracles; the unintentional and intentional exclusion of disabled people, physically, socially and theologically; and the silencing and ignoring of the voices of disabled people.[371]

The idea that Jesus personifies a perfect body, unaffected by the consequences of human sin, finds resonance with the dominance of images of perfect bodies within contemporary culture, inevitably alienating those whose bodies are perceived as imperfect and intrinsically weak. The assumption is that we need to be powerful, independent and influential to be loved by God.[372] Eiesland's "… re-symbolization of God as disabled …"[373] presents a powerful contrast to prevailing attitudes. It has the potential to enable disability and disabled people to be fully included in the church, people with disabilities being no less 'made in the image of God' than those who are non-disabled. This kind of inclusion makes it much easier to foster relationships between disabled and non-disabled people. Reliance on the Minority Group Model inevitably means that these relationships remain too generalised, between groups rather than between particular individuals.

One disadvantage of Eiesland's approach is that it seems only to apply explicitly to disabled people, and particularly to physically disabled people.[374] Reliance on liberation theology as a way to empower disabled people, combined with the Minority Group Model, effectively excludes people with learning disabilities, since agency and independent rationality are assumed.[375] There is also the potential for those who do not openly acknowledge their experience of disability, or who do not experience oppression due to their impairments, to be excluded.[376] Another criticism that has been levelled at Eiesland's case for a disabled God concerns her use of the marks of crucifixion on the risen Christ. Disabled people live with the experience and knowledge that their impairments have a real impact on their daily lives. If the marks of crucifixion are genuine impairments, then it is odd that they seem to have no apparent impact on the risen Christ. There would, in fact, be a case for saying that he is more

[371] (Eiesland, 1994, pp. 53-57, 75-87, 94-98; Swinton, 2011, p. 282)
[372] (Creamer, 2010, pp. 85-87)
[373] (Swinton, 2011, p. 283)
[374] Beth Creamer suggests that this approach is also not relevant to the Deaf community, because sign language rather than impairment is at the heart of Deaf culture (Creamer, 2009, pp. 96-103).
[375] (Creamer, 2010, pp. 85-87; Greig, 2018, pp. 36, 38; Reinders, 2008, pp. 165-167; Swinton, 2011, p. 282)
[376] (Creamer, 2010, pp. 89-90)

rather than less able, passing through walls and appearing in locked rooms.[377] As Swinton points out, there are serious questions as to whether Jesus would be disabled at all within the Minority Group Model on which Eiesland relies, a model that understands disability in terms of social discrimination rather than physical impairment.[378] One concern, expressed by Jason Greig, is that Eiesland's proposals may force churches into being responsive to the demands of disabled people for physical, social and theological access without encouraging them to be equally proactive in developing inclusive and empowering theological frameworks.[379] Hans Reinders suggests that this is partly because Eiesland's claim to encourage a two-way dialogue is not sustained. Dialogue is necessarily two-way, but Eiesland proposes a one-way movement, from disabled people outside the church towards non-disabled people inside the church.[380] I am also concerned that Eiesland's approach does very little to address the experience of isolation and lack of relationships experienced by many disabled people.[381] Hans Reinders argues that while the impact of Eiesland's work is clearly relevant to disabled people excluded from churches, it is unclear how it can transform the attitudes of non-disabled people.[382] More sympathetic to Eiesland's approach, Lisa Hickman suggests:

> The broken body is not just sacramental; it is pastoral, it is a call to justice, it is eschatological. Here, the disability scholarship challenges current work in moral injury to consider the same.[383]

I think Hickman is right, the image of the disabled God does in fact have some relevance to non-disabled people, as a call to seek justice for disabled people and others who are marginalised and excluded.

The relevance of the disabled God is one that non-disabled people may not easily recognise. I was introduced to *The Disabled God* by my college principal when I first started ministerial training in 1997, soon after this book was published. I experienced it as liberation, a book written from a perspective remarkably similar to my own, which I am confident was not the

[377] (Swinton, 2011, p. 284)
[378] (Swinton, 2011, p. 285)
[379] (Greig, 2018, p. 38)
[380] (Reinders, 2008, p. 159) A similar criticism is made by Swinton of Block's method below.
[381] (Greig, 2018, p. 39)
[382] (Reinders, 2008, pp. 172-179)
[383] (Hickman, 2018, pp. 190-191) suggests that the image of the disabled God is neither tragic nor saintly, thereby challenging two of the common understandings of disability. (Hickman, 2018, p. 191)

experience of my non-disabled principal.[384] Reading this book was so significant that I was subsequently encouraged to devote some of my undergraduate essays to themes of disability. My undergraduate dissertation was on disability and healing and, later, my MA thesis discussed models of disability and the church. A disabled writer on disability 'being with' other disabled people, rather than non-disabled writers 'being for' them, is very important when seeking participatory inclusion.[385] Alongside other voices for liberation, the metaphor of the disabled God also powerfully challenges much that is unhelpful when disabled people are thought to be weak and dependent on non-disabled people, who alone are perceived as strong. A disabled God's identification with disabled people would certainly encourage their voices to be heard.

5.3.4 Interdependent God

Kathy Black's approach, in *A Healing Homiletic*[386], is underpinned by her notion of interdependency, and its application both to human beings and to God.[387] This, she suggests, arises because of contradictions between the Bible, tradition and theology. Disabled people are seen as both blessed and cursed at the same time.[388] Black thinks that the notion of disability as God's will is a significant cause of exclusion and disempowerment of disabled people. Disability has variously been seen as: a punishment for sin; a test of faith; an opportunity for character development; a manifestation of the power of God; redemptive suffering arising from God's mysterious omnipotence and, therefore, beyond our understanding.[389] These are all influenced by a view of God formed as a result of a dominant metaphor group, of the kind described by Brian Wren and discussed in Chapter 3.[390] These views raise significant issues concerning how such a God, who is claimed to be all loving, allows or causes disabilities, which are often a source of extreme suffering for the individuals concerned.

[384] I recollect him being a bit dismissive of Eiesland's book.
[385] The move from non-disabled people 'doing for' non-disabled people to that of 'being with' follows the central argument of Sam Wells *The Nazareth Manifesto* (Wells, 2015) which I explore on page 126.
[386] (Black, 1996) writing as a non-disabled person who has worked alongside Deaf and blind people, including pastoring a Deaf church.
[387] (Creamer, 2010, pp. 83-84) suggests this leads to the idea of 'the interdependent God'.
[388] (Black, 1996, pp. 20-22)
[389] (Black, 1996, p. 23f)
[390] (Wren, 1989, p. 123f)

Black emphasises the importance of our interdependence, on God and one another. She does not, however, develop this idea as fully as she might. She rightly rejects any notion of an all-powerful God as the cause of disability but does not fully develop an alternative, more relational Trinitarian perspective. She helpfully calls for both disabled and non-disabled people to be agents of healing with one another. The nature of the relationship between disabled and non-disabled people, however, remains vague and generalised. This view of mutual ministry is particularly applicable in Baptist church communities with their emphasis on gathered communities in covenant relationships with God and one another. Reflections on the idea of our interdependence on God and one another in community has shifted my own theological framework away from its early, more conservative, position, which focussed on the dependence of individuals on God.[391]

While, in this context, Black's attention to interdependence within a community is coming from the perspective of disability, it actually applies to all people. In fact, disabled people may often number among those more aware of their interdependence than non-disabled people. The interdependent nature of our relationships with one another and with God is, Black suggests, apparent everywhere in the interconnectedness of creation and humanity.[392] While rejecting the idea that God causes disability, she suggests that God can transform disability when it happens, and that the community of faith plays a major part in this. Interdependence, for Black, means not only that are we dependent on one another and God, but that "… God depends on us to be God's agents of healing ."[393] This understanding of mutual interdependence is a powerful challenge to the 'them and us' relationship typically seen between disabled and non-disabled people. It could be an important factor in moving people from 'doing for' to 'being with' one another.

5.3.5 Accessible God

Jennie Block's *Copious Hosting*[394] is centred on the idea of hospitality towards all disabled people and other marginalised groups, utilising the physical and social spaces that church

[391] Where salvation was seen in purely personal terms rather than involving the church community.
[392] (Black, 1996, pp. 34-42)
[393] (Black, 1996, p. 186)
[394] (Block, 2002) writing as a non-disabled 'secondary consumer' (p. 12) who grew up with a disabled member of her family (pp. 12-15).

communities occupy.[395] She suggests that this task could be aided by a new look at scripture, tradition and the sacraments. Her idea of a 'conversation' between disability and Christianity indicates a desire for the voices of disabled people and non-disabled people to be equally heard in dialogue.[396] This contrasts with the tendency for non-disabled people to talk 'about' disability and their relationships with disabled people. Commenting on this idea of conversation, Swinton suggests that:

> The theological community must learn about the philosophy that drives the disability movement and, then, be willing to critique the Christian tradition in the light of that philosophy. In like fashion, the disability community must be willing to search the Christian tradition for ways that can give meaning to the experience of being disabled.[397]

Developing her idea of a conversation, Block focuses on how contemporary disability movements understand disability and the nature of the exclusion that disabled people experience.[398] The idea of a conversation only becomes more obviously problematic when she begins to dialogue with a theological understanding of disability, seeking to re-interpret some elements in the Christian tradition. As Swinton and Jacobs note, this conversation about what re-interpretation should look like can easily become one-sided. While some theological perspectives take heed of the disability studies approach, the disability studies perspective largely ignores the importance of faith in the lives of many disabled people.[399] This problem could be partially overcome by enabling disabled people on the margins of the church to fully participate in the life of the church, contributing both to the conversation about disability and to the wider life of the church.

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[395] (Creamer, 2010, p. 82) Block claims to use 'disabled people' to be inclusive of all disabled people (Block, 2002, p. 29).

[396] (Block, 2002, pp. 11-23)

[397] (Swinton, 2011, p. 286)

[398] (Block, 2002, pp. 27-53) Chapters 1–3 focus on context and language, definitions of disability and narratives of the experiences of disabled people. Hickman suggests that in doing this Block is explaining the disability movement to theologians rather than holding a conversation (Hickman, 2018, p. 194).

[399] (Jacobs, 2016, pp. 206-207; 2019, p. 82; Swinton, 2011, p. 288) Some secular writers on disability see the church, tradition and scripture as some of the dominant reasons for the historical exclusion and oppression of disabled people (Barnes & Mercer, 2010, pp. 15, 198, 243, 214-195; Oliver, 2009, pp. 34-35). A thorough search of the sociology of disability section in the University library uncovered an almost complete lack of any reference to church or faith. (Swain, French, Barnes, & Thomas, 2014, pp. 125-126) notes some research into ethnicity, religion and disability.

Block's identification of oppression in contemporary church settings is pretty uncompromising.[400] She notes three particular forms of oppression: by non-disabled people; by language; and by low expectations.[401] I certainly relate to her focus on low expectations. There have been a number of occasions, for example, when people have expressed surprise that I am 'well educated.'[402] While not all disabled people within church communities experience oppression, these three factors have certainly tended to exclude disabled people from participation in church communities.

Enabling the voices of disabled people to be heard, Lisa Hickman says, would enable churches to become aware of, and respond to, "… an 'ableist' bias in scriptures as well as the 'healing cult' within the Christian tradition aiming to 'fix' through faith healing."[403] Participatory inclusion of disabled people would probably, for example, have prevented the situation where modifications to improve access to a chapel failed to achieve their aim, because disabled people were not consulted and assumptions were made by non-disabled people.[404] It is possible, however, that this lack of consultation occurred because a physically inaccessible chapel prevented disabled people from attending and participating in services. Creamer identifies three problematic issues with Block's approach: the approach may do little more than give the impression that God is on the side of disabled people; the image of an accessible God lacks impact for both religious communities and for non-disabled people; and it has little impact once inclusion has been achieved.[405] From my experience and research, such participatory inclusion still falls short of its intended purpose.

While there are significant issues to be addressed with Block's approach, there are several aspects of her method that can be productive, namely: the relational nature of humanity; the significance of the Trinity in fostering the idea of co-hosts; and each person in a

[400] (Block, 2002, pp. 42-53) For example 'People with disabilities are so oppressed that often others do not even consider them to be oppressed.' (Block, 2002, p. 42) In contrast to her earlier expression of caution with the assumptions of oppression within a liberation theology approach (Block, 2002, pp. 20-21). Reinders suggests that she rejects the assumption of oppression while using the word (Reinders, 2008, pp. 183-184).
[401] (Block, 2002, pp. 46-49) The impact of language on the oppression of disabled people is related to the impact of metaphoric language examined in Chapter 3.
[402] Noted on page 30 and Appendix C page 213.
[403] (Hickman, 2018, p. 195) referring to (Block, 2002, p. 101). Hull contrasts his experience of 'healing service' in the twentieth century (and general approach of contemporary healing ministry) to the ministry of Jesus and his healings of blind people (Hull, 2001, pp. 36-39, 44-48).
[404] (Block, 2002, pp. 142-143; Creamer, 2010, p. 82)
[405] (Creamer, 2010, pp. 88-89; 2012b, pp. 38-39)

community being in truly mutual relationships where all participants give and receive.[406] She suggests that such relationships between disabled and non-disabled people need to become genuine friendships in order to fully benefit from a theology of access, although she stops short of exploring the full potential in such friendships.[407] This does, however, take us a significant step further than Black's still poorly focused idea of 'general relationships'.[408] Unlike many who rely on the UK Social Model of Disability, Block does recognise the real impact of impairments.[409]

We need to find a methodology that is not reliant on a dialogue when no such dialogue is possible. As suggested above, rather than attempting a futile dialogue between disability studies and theology, the task is to seek a theologically informed dialogue between disabled and non-disabled people, not least in Baptist church communities. Block develops her ideas about hospitality within an essentially relational Trinitarian framework, with a particular emphasis on Christology.[410] In the next chapter I explore characteristics of a particular pastoral Trinitarian doctrine developed by Paul Fiddes that will potentially bring mutuality to the forefront of our attention.

5.3.6 A Deaf Church Perspective

From a different angle, Hannah Lewis's *Deaf Liberation Theology*[411] provides an insight into the overlapping issues faced by the Deaf community and disabled people.[412] Deaf people, who have an impairment which would appear to place them within the definition of disabled people, often prefer to self-identify as members of a minority cultural-linguistic group. This approach would seem to be close to that of Eiesland. Both Eiesland and Lewis aim to bring liberation to groups of people who experience discrimination. There are, however, significant differences, the most significant being the application of the Minority Group Model to culture and language, rather than impairment. While Lewis engages with a number of authors, from areas of both sociology of disability and theologies of disability, she

[406] (Block, 2002, pp. 85-87, 129-156; Swinton, 2011, p. 287)
[407] (Block, 2002, pp. 160-166; Reinders, 2008, pp. 186-190)
[408] The significance of friendship for the inclusion of disabled people is addressed in depth in Chapter 7.
[409] (Block, 2002, pp. 32-36)
[410] (Block, 2002, pp. 133-138)
[411] (Lewis, 2007) writing as a Deaf person who is an ordained Anglican minister involved in leading Deaf congregations.
[412] Lewis uses 'Deaf' to refer to people describe themselves in this way, 'deaf'/'deafened' to refer to people and situations that refer to acquired hearing loss, and 'd/Deaf' when it is unclear, or she is referring to all d/Deaf people. People can be 'deaf'/'deafened' without being 'Deaf' or part of the Deaf community.

considers them to be secondary sources; they therefore do not have the same importance to her main argument as liberation theology.

Although the Deaf community does not fully identify itself as disabled, this is not something properly understood in the wider public domain, and certainly not by most non-Deaf church members. They tend to relate to Deaf people very much as they would to disabled people more generally. This means that the attitudes of non-Deaf people, who are the majority in society and church communities, form a significant barrier to the enabling of inclusion of Deaf people.

This attitude towards Deaf people even applies to some of the writers surveyed in this chapter. For instance, Nancy Eiesland's only mention of Deafness is in a list of impairments. She writes:

> … different types of functional impairment … deafness, paralysis, multiple sclerosis and mental retardation may produce the same social problems of stigma, marginality, and discrimination, but they generate vastly different functional difficulties.[413]

This would seem to imply that she is simply treating Deafness as another of many functional impairments found among disabled people, even though elsewhere she acknowledges that determining "… who 'people with disabilities' are is not … self-evident."[414]

Kathy Black, who has worked alongside Deaf and blind people, including work as Pastor to a Deaf church, addresses the issue of Deafness and hearing loss through her exploration of Mark 7:31-37.[415] She recognises the particularity of Deaf culture, and supports their rejection of any emphasis on healing, which is typically assumed by members of the hearing church congregation that hosts the Deaf church. Her concern is that those who become deafened, rather than having congenital hearing limitations, may interpret their experience as becoming disabled, and attempt to seek a cure. This can be because society and churches are not aware of the exclusion that deafened people experience. Black points out that a traditional interpretation of this passage links Deafness, faith and healing, despite not having

[413] (Eiesland, 1994, p. 24)
[414] (Eiesland, 1994, p. 23)
[415] (Black, 1996, pp. 7-8, 88-103) notes that this passage is the only New Testament text telling the story of a Deaf person. Two other New Testament texts mention Deafness, Isaiah 35:5-6 is referred to in Matthew 11:4-5 and Luke 7:22. In the Old Testament there are only limited references to Deafness (Exodus 4:11; Lev. 19:14; Psalms 38:13, 58:4; Isaiah 29:18; 35:5; 42:18-19, 43:8; Micah 7:16).

any explicit mention of faith. She suggests that this notion has been imported from Romans 10:17: "… faith comes by hearing." Metaphorical approaches to this passage do not remove this difficulty, as they still emphasise negative experiences arising from being Deaf. She suggests that a different metaphorical interpretation, one that puts the emphasis on how the community isolates people for who they are, is more helpful because it does not link Deafness with sinful behaviour.[416]

Nancy Eiesland and Don Saliers's *Human Disability and the Service of God*[417] reveals a variety of perspectives on whether Deafness is a disability or not.[418] Although there is recognition of the Deaf community as a social/linguistic minority group, their inclusion of Deafness indicates a blurring of the boundaries between recognising Deafness as different and labelling Deafness as simply another disability. Creamer is very aware of the challenge the Deaf community presents to both the Individual/Medical and Minority Group Models of disability.[419] She recognises that Deafness needs to be defined in different terms, while recognising that those who become deafened may experience exclusion from both Deaf and non-Deaf communities. This happens because they cannot communicate through sign language and find it hard to follow aural conversations. She recognises that people can be deaf/deafened without being Deaf, and without being part of the Deaf community.[420] She also notes the unique issues raised by cochlear implants, which could be said to 'cure' Deafness. Cochlear implants are by no means uniformly welcomed by the Deaf community.[421]

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[416] (Black, 1996, p. 102) Despite her earlier rejection of Deafness being a disability, Black says that this interpretation does not link "… the man's disability with any 'sinful behaviours' which are not in the text." Referring to 'disability' rather than 'Deafness' suggests Black may equate Deafness and disability.

[417] (Eiesland & Saliers, 1998)

[418] (Eiesland & Saliers, 1998) notes that Jewish exclusion of Deaf people (Melcher, p. 68), metaphoric use of Deafness (Grant, p. 78; Horne, pp. 89-99), assumption of ability to hear leading to exclusion of Deaf people (Robitscher, pp. 151, 153), assumptions about a minister's hearing (Herzog, pp. 192-193), positive aspects of being 'wounded', echoing Nouwen's wounded healer, challenging assumption of 'perfect' ministers (Herzog, p. 197), assumption of Deafness being alongside other impairments (Eiesland, p. 203), recognition of the Deaf community as 'distinct linguistic as well as cultural minority.' (Eiesland, pp. 209-211, 214), resources for disabled people (Eiesland, pp. 225-227), a prayer of lament for the exclusion of disabled people (Betenbaugh & Proctor-Smith, p. 295f).

[419] (Creamer, 2009, pp. 28-29, 96-103, 108-110)

[420] (Creamer, 2009, p. 97)

[421] (Kilgore, 2015) discusses the debate in the US context. For a UK perspective see (Gregory, 2017) Accessed 15-11-2020

In Chapter 7 of this thesis I will be suggesting that efforts to enable friendships between Deaf and non-Deaf people could potentially overcome some of the issues that exclude Deaf people from a largely non-Deaf church community.[422]

5.3.7 A Vulnerable God

Tom Reynolds's *A Vulnerable Communion*[423] is an approach to disability theology that attempts to identify the complex nature of factors shaping contemporary theological perspectives. This echoes Tom Shakespeare's interactional approach by adopting critical realism as its rationale.[424] Reynolds writes:

> … wholeness is not the product of self-sufficiency or independence, but rather of the genuinely inclusive communion that results from sharing our humanity with one another in light of the grace of God.[425]

He is critical of any all-pervasive idea of 'normality' being under-pinned by economic systems reliant on what Reynolds calls 'body capital'.[426] This he defines as:

> … a power value engineered by dominant social institutions and governed by disciplinary technologies such as education, medicine, penal systems, and even architecture.[427]

Reynolds analyses the various perspectives on disability and society, and determines that the body capital of disabled people is either discounted or undervalued in ways that marginalise disabled people from society, while at the same time promoting the self-interest of non-disabled people.[428] Churches that have uncritically adopted the Individual/Medical Model of Disability have been doing something similar. They have been disproportionately influenced by social and economic forces that have marginalised disabled people, in this case serving the spiritual self-interests of non-disabled people.[429] Reynolds argues that any 'solution' must involve the adoption of Social Models of Disability, which focus on transforming relationships between disabled and non-disabled people, thereby enabling the

[422] See page 177.
[423] (Reynolds, 2008, pp. 11-13) writing as the non-disabled parent of a child with multiple impairments and with the experience of exclusion from church communities.
[424] Discussed on page 78f.
[425] (Reynolds, 2008, p. 14)
[426] (Reynolds, 2008, pp. 58-59)
[427] (Reynolds, 2008, p. 58)
[428] (Reynolds, 2008, pp. 88-97)
[429] (Reynolds, 2008, pp. 25-31, 97-101)

formation of inclusive communities.[430] Reynolds has also suggested that it is important to shift from viewing disability as an inevitable tragedy to an acceptance of the transformative impact that social relationships can have on the inclusion of disabled people. In order to achieve this, it will be necessary to challenge the idea that 'normal' equates to 'able'.[431]

I am troubled by Reynolds's repeated call for gratitude "… for the gift of existence, which rises to the surface of our lives in a tenacious posture of hope."[432] I agree that there is a place for gratitude, for the grace of God and the love and acceptance of other people.[433] Reynolds does recognise that gratitude is not an easy panacea but that it "… affirms the gift of existence amidst those things that would deny or suppress it, or cause despair."[434] There needs to be a greater recognition that for many disabled people, experiences of exclusion, oppression, pain and loneliness give very little cause for gratitude at all. Despite this, Lisa Hickman applauds Reynolds's metaphorical reversal of 'the cult of normalcy' and supports his thorough re-working of the ideas of Creation, Redemption, the *imago dei*, Ecclesiology, and God's creating *ex nihilo*. She laments the lack of reflection on God as Trinity, but she is particularly positive about the way he understands disability when he says that disability is:

> … a range of physiologically rooted social performances, a series of moments defined by relationships between human beings … the distinction between ability and disability is built into the fabric of communal life.[435]

In seeking to challenge the dominance of self-interest, usually benefitting non-disabled people, Reynolds examines the significance of weakness and vulnerability in seeking the positive value of community as a way to strengthen relationships with one another and God. Proper recognition of interdependency, Reynolds suggests, is a better reflection of how God enables us to participate in faith communities, as a matter of grace rather than ability.[436] Reynolds advocates privileging disabled people, believing that this will enable both disabled and non-disabled people to recognise their shared experience as vulnerable human beings. This resonates with Beth Creamer's emphasis on the need for all human beings to recognise

[430] (Reynolds, 2008, p. 14)
[431] (Reynolds, 2012b, p. 37)
[432] (Reynolds, 2008, p. 138)
[433] (Reynolds, 2008, pp. 138-170, 206-248)
[434] (Reynolds, 2008, p. 141)
[435] (Hickman, 2018, pp. 211-215; Reynolds, 2008, p. 53)
[436] (Reynolds, 2008, pp. 124-135, 154-174) contrasts our resistance to participation with others and God, and our openness to participation with God in creation. The way God enables us to participate in God's covenant relationship with humanity and all of creation is explored in Chapter 6.

that they have limits.[437] It would have been good to see more examples of what these relationships might look like in practice. In a more recent paper, Reynolds does focus on the potential for friendships between disabled and non-disabled people, concluding that the inclusion of disabled people has to be more about 'being with' than 'doing for'.[438]

John Swinton suggests that one of the advantages of Reynolds's approach shows itself in his willingness to engage with issues of modernity, and his clear commitment to disability rights.[439] Within the church, there can be little excuse for failing to build inclusive communities by recognising our mutual vulnerability. Beyond the church, too, there have to be ways of similarly challenging the exclusion and oppression of disabled people. His reflections on the role of covenant relationships, when the church is understood as the household of God, has obvious congruence with Baptist ecclesiologies.[440] I will want to further develop the ideas that Reynolds has provided in my own quest to promote inclusive Baptist church communities.

5.3.8 God of Limits

Beth Creamer's *Disability and Christian Theology*[441] recognises the problem of relying on a dialogue between theology and disability studies, given that even a volume like *The Handbook of Disability Studies*[442] gives religion barely a mention.[443] Having examined the approaches, she finds little comfort in the limited impact of writers such as Eiesland, Black and Block.[444] She herself chooses to focus on the role of 'limits' that apply to all people and not merely disabled people being seen as 'limited'.[445] Creamer emphasises that all human beings, simply by being human, have limits. None of us is divine, and every human being has

[437] (Creamer, 2009) See next section below.
[438] (Reynolds, 2012a) On page 175, I suggest that these relationships are best understood in terms of friendship.
[439] (Swinton, 2011, pp. 291, 298-299) suggests that Hauerwas's and Reinders's rejection of modernity and liberal politics is problematic as it leaves disabled people vulnerable to oppression outside the church.
[440] (Reynolds, 2008, pp. 233-238)
[441] (Creamer, 2009) writing as an academic with secondary experience of disability, the exact nature of which is unclear. She argues that being disabled in itself does not automatically enable you to understand and write from the very different perspective of other disabled people but does provide common experience of limits (p. 8).
[442] (Albrecht et al., 2001)
[443] (Creamer, 2009, p. 78)
[444] (Creamer, 2010, p. 91)
[445] (Creamer, 2009, pp. 91-114; Greig, 2018, p. 36) Grieg notes that while social exclusion is dominant in Eiesland's approach, this is always restricted to those with impairments.

to respond to the limits they encounter. .[446] She is unusual among contemporary disability theology writers in finding positive elements to the Individual/Medical Model of Disability, believing that it provides a reminder of the wide variety of impairments that can lead to an experience of exclusion.[447] Creamer's three primary claims are: limits are an unsurprising characteristic of humanity; limits are an intrinsic aspect of humanity; limits are good or, at the very least, not evil.[448]

Michael Mawson, in a paper building on Creamer's work, highlights some particular concerns. He wonders to what extent we are able to determine our own limits, and questions whether Creamer has provided sufficient resources to enable a genuine re-imagining of God.[449] He is concerned about the way that limits should be classified: which ones are to be embraced, and which ones we should seek to overcome.[450] Using ideas he finds in the work of Judith Butler, he suggests that there is "… a kind of subjectivity that is attentive to limits."[451] When he tries to relate this to Creamer's idea of limits, he finds problems with Creamer's implication that we can "… take ownership and control over … embodied limits."[452] Clearly, for wheelchair users like myself, this is impossible. While there may be differences in the way that different individuals respond to similar limits, there remain aspects of these limits which are beyond our control.[453] An appropriate wheelchair, and a suitable physical and social context, may reduce the impact of my impairment, but I will not be able to overcome the limit imposed by my inability to stand or walk. As Mawson points out, the assumption that we have the ability to recognise and interpret limits almost certainly excludes people with learning disabilities.

One of the advantages of a model based on 'limits' is that it makes it clear that there are no well-defined boundaries between disabled and non-disabled people.[454] Within the

[446] This challenges the naïve claim 'everyone is disabled', as Jacobs says: "… neoliberal society is dominated by a disability discourse that claims that we are all disabled, without examining the social structures that relegate disabled people to positions of peripheral embodiment." (Jacobs, 2019, p. 245)
[447] (Creamer, 2009, pp. 53-56)
[448] (Creamer, 2009, pp. 31-33; Swinton, 2011, p. 289)
[449] (Mawson, 2013, p. 410)
[450] (Mawson, 2013, p. 411)
[451] (Mawson, 2013, pp. 412-413)
[452] (Mawson, 2013, p. 413)
[453] (Creamer, 2009, p. 117)
[454] (Creamer, 2012b) argues that disability is part of a continuum which includes all people, rather being a discrete category or categories. This suggests we draw arbitrary lines on this continuum when we refer to disabled or non-disabled people. Reynolds blurs the distinction between disabled and non-disabled people through a recognition of our shared vulnerability, see above.

Individual/Medical Model and the Minority Group Model, a person is either disabled or non-disabled. If it is true that we all have limits simply be being human, then it might be possible to argue that we have more in common with one another than we have differences. The inclusion of disabled people then becomes a matter of understanding why we see some limits as negative, leading to exclusion, and others as positive, or at least neutral. Creamer's argument, to which I shall return in chapter 7, is that the use of limits leads us to re-think our understanding of God.[455] Creamer suggests that this kind of understanding of God can be developed by using Sally McFague's metaphor, the world as the body of God.[456] In the next chapter I reflect on the significance of a relational Trinitarian approach, which is inclusive of disabled and non-disabled people.

5.3.9 A Pastoral Care Model of Disability

In her recent PhD research, *The Upside-down Kingdom of God*,[457] Naomi Jacobs has carried out important field research with disabled people in a variety of church contexts. I have addressed her discussion of the experiences of the participants in in Chapter 2.[458] Here I explore her argument that the so-called 'pastoral care model', adopted by many churches, is a significant barrier to the inclusion of disabled people.[459] This model has powerfully shaped many churches' understanding of disability, and influenced the way they view the relationship between disabled and non-disabled people.[460]

Jacobs is concerned about the idea of pastoral power.[461] She argues that pastoral power:

> … has shaped the way in which society now manages those who are constructed as vulnerable, those who experience mental health problems and those in receipt of medical treatment.[462]

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[455] (Creamer, 2010, pp. 111-114) Mawson is particularly critical of this aspect of Creamer's approach (Mawson, 2013, p. 414f). See also (Hull, 2014, pp. 85-90). For discussion of the concept of limits and understanding God, see page 180.

[456] (Creamer, 2009, pp. 58-73)

[457] (Jacobs, 2019) writing as a disabled person with a background in disability rights, from a faith perspective. She acknowledges that she is currently on the fringes of the church community (Jacobs, 2019, p. 39f).

[458] See pages 40f.

[459] Jacobs uses the terms 'pastoral care model' and 'pastoral model' interchangeably throughout her thesis.

[460] (Yong, 2014) Argues that uncritical assumptions concerning disability and suffering have shaped pastoral care to focus on alleviating such perceived suffering.

[461] (Jacobs, 2019, pp. 24-25) Jacobs is using Foucault's understanding of pastoral power in Foucault, M. 1982. The Subject and Power. Critical Inquiry, 8 (4), 777-795. She blurs the boundary between pastoral model and pastoral power at times.

[462] (Jacobs, 2019, p. 24)

She describes the use of pastoral power by non-disabled people over disabled people as:

> … characterised by disempowering and unequal power relationships between disabled people and professionals who have definitional power over disability.[463]

The use of pastoral power has been the key to churches' pastoral care of disabled people and has often been expressed in terms of charity.[464] One result of this, according to Jacobs, is that "… most theology of disability remains rooted in pastoral theology."[465] I strongly suggest that the problem is not that theologies of disability are rooted in pastoral theology itself, but that inappropriate 'pastoral care models' of disability are rooted in narrow and impoverished parodies of pastoral theology.[466] These parodies sustain problematic assumptions about disability's link to sin, requiring forgiveness, and to illness, requiring healing. She argues, correctly I think, that such a skewed approach, in both pastoral care and theology, leads to the 'othering' of disabled people, and reinforces the 'doing for' relationship between disabled and non-disabled people, which denies them agency, silences their voices, and can lead to segregated patterns of ministry.[467] There are close connections between the inappropriate 'pastoral care model' that Jacobs identifies and the Individual/Medical Model of Disability.[468] She is, however, incorrect to say that "… pastoral theology encourages an individual model approach to disability, precluding a focus on justice."[469]

Jacobs identifies many examples of the way that such an approach excludes disabled people, in both the literature she surveys and in her own research.[470] Her participants included people with a wide range of impairments, ordained and non-ordained, paid and volunteer, and from a variety of church traditions.[471] Many participants reported that their experiences

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[463] (Jacobs, 2019, p. 25)
[464] Jacobs cites Black, Eiesland and Lewis concerning a pastoral care relationship (Jacobs, 2019, p. 25).
[465] (Jacobs, 2019, p. 85)
[466] A valid critique of pastoral care is that it has failed to give proper attention to disability, although the situation has changed in recent years. Jacobs seems at times to equate pastoral care and pastoral theology (Jacobs, 2019, p. 86). As noted above she also uses the terms 'pastoral care model' and 'pastoral model' interchangeably.
[467] (Jacobs, 2019, pp. 85-88)
[468] See page 65.
[469] (Jacobs, 2019, pp. 86, 91)
[470] Jacobs cites Black, Block, Creamer, Eiesland, Hull, Lewis and others. Jacobs found that some churches restricted or prevented her discussions with disabled people, an outcome of the assumptions of vulnerability underpinning the pastoral care model (Jacobs, 2019, pp. 48-50)
[471] (Jacobs, 2019, pp. 286-293) provides brief summaries of her participants. She interviewed 30 people out of a pool of over 100 potential participants (Jacobs, 2019, pp. 55, 57).

of exclusion were shaped by the dominance of the inappropriate use of a 'pastoral care model'.[472]

One of the strengths of Jacobs's work, namely the diversity of her participants, can easily become a potential weakness. While this diversity enables Jacobs to identify a root cause of exclusion, it also makes it difficult to discern how such exclusion should be addressed, an issue that Jacobs recognises.[473] It is one of the reasons I have chosen to focus my research on the exclusion of one particular group of people, those with physical disabilities. There is a similar issue that arises because of the sheer diversity of Christian traditions in an increasingly fluid ecumenical context. In fact, many participants have experiences of more than one Christian tradition.[474] Jacobs wants to make a distinction between disability theologies and theologies of disability.[475] Jacobs argues that "… *disability theologies* emerge from disabled people's socially located positions, [whereas] disabled people are more often objects of *theology of disability* than its agents".[476] Such a clear-cut separation is overly simplistic, yet it does highlight that disability theology is *embodied* in a way that theologies of disability often are not. There is value, I think, in using positionality to help locate the various authors in the field, which usefully helps to clarify a particular author's perspective.

In order to enable physically disabled people to participate in the life of church communities, Jacobs offers two significant proposals. The first is that the voices and theologies of disabled people need to be heard by non-disabled people. The second is the need to transform relationships between disabled people and those non-disabled people who hold power within church organisations and structures. These proposals are designed to enable disabled people to be agents of both theology and ministry, rather than being objects and passive beneficiaries.[477] This necessitates an intentional change, both by those with power and by disabled people themselves, working mutually together. The particular context of church congregations and disabled people within them is very important, and I pick this up in Chapter 7.

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[472] (Jacobs, 2019, pp. 141-175)
[473] (Jacobs, 2019, p. 55)
[474] (Jacobs, 2019, pp. 56-57)
[475] (Jacobs, 2019, pp. 72-84, 209-247)
[476] (Jacobs, 2019, p. 209) Contra Hull who uses 'theology of disability' and 'disability theology' interchangeably (Hull, 2014, p. 51f).
[477] (Jacobs, 2019, p. 248)

It follows from Jacobs's distinction between disability theologies and theologies of disability that disabled people must be empowered to become agents of theology. Mutual relationships between disabled and non-disabled people enable a meaningful dialogue to occur from different perspectives. This can usefully take place within a congregation or in a regional church organisation. Such conversations also need to be held in academic contexts with disabled people fully included.

5.4 Positionality of Writers

Apart from Pailin's *A Gentle Touch*, which addresses the concerns of people with severe multiple disabilities, Lewis's *A Deaf Church*, which describes the Deaf community, and Jacobs's *The Upside-down Kingdom of* God which includes a range of disabled people, the other approaches surveyed so far have concerned people with physical disabilities.

There are a number of discernible strands within disability theology, and identifying them can be useful. It is important, for example, whether or not the author is disabled, is closely connected to disabled people, or is non-disabled.[478] It is also useful to know whether or not the author draws heavily on disability studies approaches, or grounds their work in mainstream theological discourse.[479] Hans Reinders suggests that in the case of those reliant on disability studies approaches "… 'disability' is inscribed into the very being of God".[480] The approach taken by Hauerwas and Pailin, Reinders says, "… does not depend on disability as a social construct that needs to be theologically deconstructed." Instead, they "… construe

[478] (Schummer, 2019, p. 66) suggests that disability theologies developed by disabled people are processing *this* experience while those developed by non-disabled people are processing *that* experience. This is parallel to issues of 'being with' and 'being for' (Wells, 2015). Hans Reinders suggests pastoral care versus critical reflection (Reinders, 2013a, pp. 31-32). Reinders also raises a parallel question concerning 'insiders' and 'outsiders' regarding people with profound learning disabilities (Reinders, 2008, pp. 6-8). From a sociological perspective, the move from the 'non-disabled' to the 'disabled' perspective on disability was seen as crucial (Barnes & Oliver, 1993). Hauerwas positions himself as an 'outsider' regarding people with learning disabilities, since he has no direct relationships with disabled people. He questions the tension between this and being an 'insider', particularly concerning the question of whether he is 'using' people with learning disabilities to provide test cases for his theological argument (Hauerwas, 1986/2004a). He suggests that his lack of relationship with any people with learning disabilities and therefore his 'working for' approach has led him to cease writing about people with learning disabilities. (Hauerwas, 2004, p. 196). (Barnes, 1996) argues that: "… disability research is about researching oppression … then researchers should not be professing 'mythical independence' to disabled people …" (p. 110).

[479] (Swinton, 2011, p. 275)

[480] (Reinders, 2008, p. 191)

intellectual disability as part of the human condition." I would suggest that this can be extended to all disabled people.[481]

The distinction between disabled and non-disabled writers is important for those who are writing from a disability rights approach, whose early campaign slogans included "Nothing about us without us". More recently some writers have been influenced by identity politics, which argues that only disabled people can talk about disability.[482] Reinders connects this to the emerging concepts of 'disability culture' and 'disabled pride', potentially reinforcing the disabled/non-disabled dichotomy, rather than focusing on a common humanity.[483] He also reminds us that an emphasis on disability culture risks excluding people with learning disabilities.[484] Liberation theologies make the point that the participation of 'the poor'[485] in working for freedom from oppression is a crucial component.[486] Another distinction asks whether the inclusion of disabled people reshapes the understanding of God, or whether an understanding of God reshapes the understanding of disabled people. Swinton holds the distinctions together, suggesting that "… the impact of God images on theological anthropology and ecclesial practice and the subservience of theology to modernity [or late-modernity] form central streams that traverse the field of disability theology."[487] I am in no doubt that the context in which authors write always needs to be taken into account. Among the writers I have quoted so far, only Nancy Eiesland and Naomi Jacobs explicitly state that they are disabled people. Hannah Lewis is Deaf and, as discussed previously, does not identify as disabled.[488] She does, however, speak and write from within the Deaf community.

[481] (Reinders, 2008, p. 192)
[482] (Reinders, 2008, pp. 62-68) for a discussion of disability identity and the role of impairments and social attitudes. This highlights some issues with the minority group model. If you are disabled and therefore 'inside' the minority group you are seen as oppressed, which is not true of all disabled people. If you are non-disabled and therefore 'outside' the minority group you are seen as an oppressor, which is not true of all non-disabled people. (Swinton, 2011, pp. 286-287)
[483] (Reinders, 2008, pp. 132-137) For a discussion regarding the concept of the culture of disability see (S. E. Brown, 1994).
[484] (Reinders, 2008, pp. 137-138)
[485] Referring not just to economically poor but all groups who are marginalised in various ways by different powerful groups in society.
[486] While Hauerwas can to some extent justify being an 'outsider' speaking for people with learning disabilities, this position is harder to justify for people with physical disabilities who can effectively self-advocate (Hauerwas, 1986/2004a).
[487] (Swinton, 2011, p. 277)
[488] For a discussion of Deaf communities as socio-linguistic minority groups see 5.3.6 above.

All the other writers are non-disabled people with varying degrees of personal contact with disabled people.[489]

Whatever perspective these writers have, there is one common feature. They all identify one or more barriers that exclude disabled people from church communities. Each proposes a range of ways of overcoming these barriers to enable disabled people to become actively involved in faith communities.

5.5 Shifting the Perspective

While some writers, such as Eiesland, recognise that their approach is limited to people with physical disabilities, others suggest that their own approach applies to all disabled people. Hans Reinders makes the point, several times, that disability rights approaches, often allied to liberation theologies, assume the agency of disabled people. This means that people with 'profound disabilities'[490] are effectively excluded from these approaches. Included in his criticism are aspects of Pailin's work, and the formal approach of the Roman Catholic Church.[491] Such approaches risk implying that change can only come from outside the church and the Christian tradition, as highlighted by the lack of an extensive body of literature on Christian theology and disability at the time when Reinders was writing.[492] Recently, the articles regarding the attitude of Christians towards disabled people, written by the blind atheist journalist Damon Rose, have triggered important debates among friends and colleagues within the church about how we should relate to disabled people beyond the church.[493] Responding to those who argue that 'access' to physical and social space within churches is the major issue, Reinders argues that he does not "… regard 'space' as the crucial issue … in the end, participation does not depend on space but *commitment*."[494] Many churches think that once physical access is possible, disabled people will automatically become involved in the life of the church communities. This thesis argues that this is not sufficient to enable participatory inclusion.

[489] Hauerwas, Pailin, Black, Block, Reynolds, Creamer.
[490] Reinders's preferred term, since his focus is on those with limited communication.
[491] (Reinders, 2008, pp. 11-16, 19-24, 24-28, 68-73, 80-85, 220-224, 231-238) Yong and Mumford suggest that there are problems determining the 'official' Roman Catholic position and that Reinders's understanding tends towards a pre-Vatican II position (Mumford, 2010; Yong, 2010).
[492] (Reinders, 2008, p. 159)
[493] (Rose, 2019a, 2019b)
[494] (Reinders, 2008, p. 161) Italics added. Reinders develops the nature of this commitment through the idea of friendship which I outline below and then utilise on page 175.

Reinders's conclusion might seem overly pessimistic, when he writes:

> … the disability-rights approach leaves unquestioned what causes the exclusion of these humans in the first place, which is that most people in our moral culture do not want them to be part of their lives. .[495]

Remembering that he is writing about issues concerning the inclusion of people with learning disabilities, this blunt statement may well be true. From my own experience, many people do want to include disabled people in general, but are unaware of the linguistic, sociological and theological barriers that exist, preventing that inclusion from becoming a reality. Not only is Reinders critical of Eiesland and Block, the two disability-rights approaches he examines in detail, but he also suggests that, together with Hauerwas and Pailin, there are many critical questions that remain to be answered.[496] He suggests that:

> … the questions they leave unanswered point in the direction of where the next stage of our theological reflection needs to go.[497]

5.6 Moving from General Relationships to Friendship

In this final section of the chapter, I want to look at Reinders's proposal for how to move forward, sketching out his argument for the inclusion of people with learning disabilities through the gift of friendship. It is possible to create an artificial divide between issues that relate to physical disability and those which relate to learning disabilities.[498] While many individuals are predominantly affected by either physical or learning impairments, there are a significant number of people who live with an experience of both. It is therefore important to identify resources that enable connections to be made and to develop an approach that welcomes all disabled people into church communities.

Reinders's aim is to develop a theological anthropology which is inclusive of all disabled people.[499] Reinders is concerned about relationships between disabled and non-disabled people, arguing that it is not enough for these to be 'general' relationships, but that they need to be 'particular' friendships. This, he thinks, is based extrinsically on the gift of friendship that God has offered to all human beings, and not just on intrinsic capabilities or

[495] (Reinders, 2008, p. 163)
[496] (Reinders, 2008, p. 164)
[497] (Reinders, 2008, p. 164)
[498] Theological work has tended to either address physical disability or intellectual/learning disability.
[499] (Reinders, 2013b, pp. 41, n12)

characteristics.[500] He argues that such relationships are rooted in the participation of all human beings in the divine community of God.

My intention, in the next chapter, is to examine how inclusion can be grounded in a theology of God as Trinity, in particular the form developed by the Baptist theologian, Paul Fiddes.

5.7 Interim Conclusion

This chapter has traced the emergence of disability theology in the late twentieth century, building on a long prior history of theological reflection on disability. This began with a particular focus on people with learning disabilities, as in the writings of Hauerwas and Vanier, and I used Hull's threefold theological map to locate disability theologies within a wider theological context.

I looked at a number of theological understandings of disability, identifying strengths and weaknesses. These had all been developed with the intention of fostering the inclusion of disabled people in church communities. They typically emphasised the mutuality of disabled and non-disabled people. Particular emphases have emerged, most significantly between physically disabled people and people with learning disabilities.

Many of the approaches I have considered, however, have failed to acknowledge clearly enough the importance of relationships. Even where relationships have received attention, they tend to be generalised, and the specificity of friendship is left only vaguely defined.

My aim, as this thesis develops, is to explore much more fully how particular understandings of disability and understandings of God are tightly intertwined.

[500] (Reinders, 2008, p. 279)

Conclusion to Part 2

Part two of this thesis set out to explore three perspectives that shape contemporary understandings of disability and the nature of relationships between disabled and non-disabled people. The use of language, both descriptive and metaphorical, reflects and shapes the underlying sociological and theological understandings of disability. Within church communities, the dominance of an inappropriate 'pastoral care model' leads to an approach to disabled people that reinforces the language of 'them and us', restricting the development of relationships and perpetuating the assumption that disability is a characteristic of individuals. This only serves to sustain the negative impact of the Individual/Medical Model of Disability which tends to exclude rather than include disabled people.

Through this exploration so far, three themes begin to emerge: intention; mutuality; particularity. The use and abuse of language, adoption of different sociological models and theological understandings of disability can all be used to intentionally exclude or include disabled people. In a similar way language, social models and theological approaches to disability and disabled people can either deny the mutuality between all people and their relationships with God, or it can recognise our mutual relationships in ways that foster inclusion. There is a significant tension between approaches that focus either on general or on particular relationships between disabled and non-disabled people. There are approaches that view disabled people using general language (for example, through the use of the term 'the disabled'), largely ignoring the wide range of differences between individuals. Other approaches overemphasise individuals and their particular impairments, tending to deny relationships with other disabled and non-disabled people.

The challenge in the next section of this thesis is to discover intentional ways of fostering relationships that recognise the mutuality of disabled and non-disabled people, whilst at the same time appropriately handling the tension between a universal understanding of human beings as 'in the image of God', and the particular contexts and experiences of disabled and non-disabled people.

Part 3 Theological Reflection on Trinity, Covenant and Inclusion

Chapter 6 Baptists, Trinity, Covenant and Ecclesiology

6.1 Introduction

The third part of the pastoral cycle moves from exploration into theological reflection. This chapter will describe Baptist communities, in which the gathered local church is primary. At the centre will be Baptist understandings of covenant relationships and Baptist ecclesiologies. I will explore key aspects of the work of a contemporary Baptist theologian, Paul Fiddes, who has given special attention to a relational doctrine of God as Trinity. This lends itself to addressing what it means to live the Christian faith as a relational community. Two aspects of Fiddes's doctrine, 'persons *as* relation' and 'participation', will emerge with particular relevance to relationships between disabled and non-disabled people in Baptist churches. Fiddes's understanding of God as Trinity enables a particular understanding of covenant relationships, a central motif in Baptist ecclesiologies. This will focus attention on the nature of relationships, within the Trinity, between God and creation, and among people. Focussing on relationship moves the emphasis away from the real and perceived differences between disabled and non-disabled people. I suggest that this is particularly conducive to the development of relationships in general and friendships in particular.

6.2 The Baptist Context

I have already drawn attention to the importance of intentionality, mutuality and particularity in relationships between disabled and non-disabled people. I now want to make connections between these characteristics and Baptist understandings of Christian community. Today's Baptists have their roots back in the early seventeenth century. For early Baptists, intentional and mutual covenant-making formed a basis for the way they understood their relationships with God and fellow believers in an essentially local congregation.[501]

[501] The concept of covenant, a central theme to both the Old and New Testaments, influenced Baptist understandings of covenant relationships within and between congregations. For a discussion of the relationship of *conditional* and *unconditional* covenants in the Old Testament, as a matter of emphasis rather than difference, see (Fiddes, 2003, pp. 74-78). For a recognition of some negative aspects of covenant see (Sparkes, 2002).

After the Reformation and formal separation of the Church of England from Rome, it was assumed that everyone in England was automatically a member of the State Church.[502] Early Protestant separatists, some of whom would later be known as Baptists, were persecuted for their determination to break free of state control, many experiencing severe oppression. It became essential for them to know who they could trust and who might betray them to the authorities. Groups of dissenters used the idea of a covenant as a way to express their commitment to God and to one another. One of the foundational moments in Baptist history was the drawing up of a covenant by the Gainsborough congregation in 1607, before they later became known as Baptists.[503] This was the first of many covenant documents that were written during the seventeenth century. They included carefully worded Statements of Faith that came to be known as Confessions.[504]

These documents served a number of purposes. It is possible to see in them a tension between those who advocated an inclusive attitude towards other believers, and those who supported the exclusion of those who held a different theological position. Baptist theologian John Colwell writes:

> Our seventeenth century forbears defined themselves ecclesially over against Episcopalianism, Presbyterianism, and State imposition. It was in this context that they affirmed liberty of conscience and the integrity of the local church.[505]

There were several motives at work in the decision to write Confessions. An earlier Baptist theologian, Barrie White, names four:

> … as a basis for inter-congregational fellowship, as teaching instruments and as summaries of the Christian faith generally, and most importantly of all, to show how close on the whole most of their doctrinal positions were to mainstream Protestantism.[506]

A desire to affirm the importance of tradition and the Bible, and also a desire to strengthen links with other like-minded congregations, often led to a tension, because of their desire to

[502] One fundamental difference in ecclesiology centres on the nature of baptism. For the Church of England all those baptised as infants are part of the church, whereas for Baptists the church comprises of those baptised on declaration of personal faith. During the seventeenth century this difference was often backed by legislation which enforced adherence to the Church of England (White, 1996, pp. 8-13, 19, 100, 103f).
[503] (Fiddes, 2003, pp. 21-22)
[504] Early Baptist church records often contain both confessional and covenantal documents (Fiddes, 2003, p. 46). (Lumpkin, 1959) gathers a range of confessions from early separatists, and both General and Particular Baptists.
[505] (Colwell, 2017, pp. 21-22)
[506] (White, 1996, p. 164)

differentiate themselves from the influence of the newly established Anglican Church.[507] The tension between being inclusive and exclusive has been a recurrent theme among Baptists and other evangelical non-conformists throughout their four-hundred-year history.[508] Two streams of Baptists emerged in England in the early seventeenth century, General Baptists and Particular Baptists, and these two streams remained keen to differentiate themselves from one another.[509] For each stream, early covenant documents were intentional statements designed to define and regulate their life together as Baptists in a local context.

The Baptists' intentional rejection of the authority of the State Church and recognition of the importance of the 'gathered church' was a hallmark of early Baptist life. Mutual relationships with one another before God were key to the local gathered congregation. This was strengthened during the seventeenth century by the emergence of two much-used metaphorical phrases, 'walking together' and 'watching over one another'.[510] These phrases made clear what it meant in practice to be a covenant community.[511] The dynamic images conveyed by these phrases suggest a group of people journeying together, and a people open to the future. This is emphasised by a third phrase which completes the picture: "… in ways known and to be made known".[512] The Baptist church was not a group of individuals who simply happened to be 'walking together' in the same direction, but a group of believers who were intentionally 'walking together' with common purpose, caring for and supporting one another on the journey, as a group of friends might. The purpose and direction of the journey, they claimed, was not of their own choosing but was '… in the

[507] (Hayden, 1990, pp. 140-143; Haymes, 2017) for discussions of these connections to traditions and creeds.
[508] (Randall, 2005, pp. 51, 53) notes the appeal to creeds in the early twentieth century, after the Downgrade Controversy and the formation of the Baptist Union at the end of the nineteenth century. (Colwell, 2009) notes the recurrence of a call for reference to the creeds or the formulation of a modern confession in the late twentieth century during a period of increased ecumenical involvement. (Hayden, 1985) was a proponent of the need for a confessional basis in the late twentieth century. In the second decade of the twenty-first century this tension has re-emerged over the issue of same-sex marriage, see (Allison-Glenny et al., 2017) for an appeal for an inclusive approach, under the Declaration of Principle rather than a credal document.
[509] (Briggs, 1994; R. E. Brown, 1986; Randall, 2005; White, 1996) General and Particular Baptists remained separate until the formation of the Baptist Union of Great Britain (BUGB) at the end of the nineteenth century (Briggs, 1994, pp. 96-157). The basis for this is the Declaration of Principle which is covenantal rather than confessional in nature as discussed in (Kidd, 1996).
[510] The metaphors used here, of 'walking' and 'watching', do not exclude those who cannot physically walk or who are blind or partially sighted, unless taken literally. See page 56.
[511] (Fiddes, 2003, pp. 22-23; Holmes, 2012a, p. 157) For a discussion of the Scriptural origins of 'walking together' and the connection with covenant relationships with God see (Kreitzer & Rooke, 2014). The authors link the metaphor to seventeenth-century Baptist understanding of the covenant.
[512] (Fiddes, 2003, p. 22) discusses the importance of 'in ways to be made known', referred to as the 'further light clause' see (A. R. Cross, 2011) See also (Haymes, 1985; Kidd, 1985, 1996).

Lord's ways',[513] which they discerned together in a church meeting.[514] When Baptists met as church, they did so intentionally, gathering together to seek 'the Lord's way'. In this way, covenant relationships became strengthened within and between congregations.[515] This is further evidenced by the early formation of local Associations served by Messengers, whose role was to foster good relationships between local congregations.[516]

In the late twentieth century there was a renewed interest in the historic idea of covenant, and a new look at the relationships that it implies.[517] The recent interest in the idea of covenant has led to a broadening of scope of the covenant-idea, both within and beyond Baptist church communities.[518]

Later in this chapter I will examine how contemporary Baptist understandings of covenant and ecclesiology, especially as shaped by Fiddes's understanding of God as Trinity, can serve to encourage the participatory inclusion of disabled people. Although Trinitarian doctrines are sometimes perceived by outsiders as overly abstract, Fiddes is confident that he can:

> … develop an image of God which is appropriate to the demands of experience in pastoral care for others, whether we exercise that care as ordained or lay members of the Christian church, whether as members of the 'caring professions' or as those who have been called, through circumstances, to devote their lives as unpaid 'carers'.[519]

[513] (Fiddes, 2003, p. 22) identifies this in the covenant of the separatist congregation at Gainsborough in 1606 or 1607, becoming a recurrent theme through many of the seventeenth century covenantal and confessional documents drawn up by Baptists.

[514] The 'church meeting' is commonly used as a noun, however deeper meaning may be revealed by using it as a verb, particularly in light of the first clause of the Declaration of Principle 'that each Church has the liberty, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to interpret and administer His Laws.' (Kidd, 1996, p. 10)

[515] (Toth, 2015, pp. 82-83) Toth discusses the tension between personal convictions and the process of discerning 'the rule of Christ' with others.

[516] (R. E. Brown, 1986; White, 1996) explore the diverse nature of Associations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

[517] (Jackson, 2009, pp. 68-71) examines the lack of attention to covenant during the twentieth century until the 1980s. This body of work includes papers published by Paul Fiddes in the 1990s which are gathered and edited in *Tracks and Traces* (Fiddes, 2003); essays by various authors gathered in *Bound to Love* (Fiddes, 1985b) and *Bound for Glory?* (Clarke, 2002b); the jointly written publications *On the Way of Trust* (Kidd, Fiddes, Haymes, & Quick, 1997); and *Something to Declare* (Kidd, 1996). The broader resurgence of interest among evangelicals is surveyed in (Sexton, 2011). (Jackson, 2009, p. 65) argues that *Bound for Glory* makes a clear argument for an open and inclusive covenant.

[518] (Goodliff, 2019, p. 34f) argues that during the 1990s there were two identifiable streams for renewal: mission and covenant among Baptists. Although not exclusive, it was the mission stream that came to dominate the agenda.

[519] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 7)

While I stand by the reservations I have already expressed of the potential damage that an inappropriate 'pastoral care model' can mean for disabled people in general, I am confident that the idea of God as Trinity, as laid out by Fiddes in his book *Participating in God,*[520] provides important insights central to the aims of this thesis.

6.3 The Relational Trinity

In his contribution to the book *Two Views of the Trinity,* Paul Fiddes says:

> … the most adequate and appropriate language we have available to speak about the 'persons' of the Holy Trinity is that they are relations. More dynamically, they are movements of life and love that have some resemblance to the relationships that we recognize between finite persons.[521]

Building on this understanding of the 'persons', Fiddes shows how this can lead to a highly relational understanding of both the Trinity and our own participatory inclusion in the dynamic life of God.[522]

6.3.1 The Context

The idea of God as Trinity, right at the heart of Christian theology, has a long and complex history. It can be traced from its origins in the early church, through the complex debates of the fourth and fifth centuries, the East/West split in the Great Schism, the Reformation, the Counter-Reformation and the Enlightenment.

The development of the doctrine of the Trinity in the twentieth century has largely focused on the concept of a Social Trinity, although this view is not uniformly held.[523] This is a range of understandings gathered around the idea of relationality, and the concept of 'persons *in* relationship'.[524] There is a wide range of perspectives, and a variety of conclusions have been drawn. The theme of relationality provides a way of understanding the relationship between the 'immanent' Trinity, understood as 'God in Godself' or 'God in eternity', and the

[520] (Fiddes, 2000)
[521] (Fiddes, 2014, pp. 159-160)
[522] (Fiddes, 2000, pp. 46--56, 62ff)
[523] (Grenz, 2001, pp. 9-14, 23-57) provides a detailed account of the development of the so-called Social Trinity perspectives. (Holmes, 2012b, pp. 1-32) provides an overview of the twentieth century developments, arguing that the Social Trinity perspective has dominated throughout the twentieth century. The remainder of his book is a defence of 'classic' views of the Trinity. (Sexton, 2014) gives four perspectives on the Trinity; an evangelical and catholic perspective on 'classic'; and 'credal' and 'radical' perspectives on relational Trinity.
[524] (Fiddes, 2000, pp. 16-19) When referring to this core idea of the Social Trinity perspectives I shall use 'persons *in* relation'. When referring to the core concept within Fiddes's Relational Trinity I shall use 'persons *as* relation'.

'economic' Trinity, understood as 'God in salvation' or 'God in the world'. The relationship between the immanent and the economic Trinity has been conceived in many different ways. Karl Rahner is associated with what has become known as *Rahner's Rule*, that "… the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity."[525]

Writing from a Liberation Theology perspective, Leonardo Boff points us towards a strong link between God as Trinity and the relationships between people in community. He writes:

> The Trinity communicates itself whenever communion is established on earth. It is also experienced as hope and anticipated in this hope whenever the oppressed and their allies fight against tyranny and oppression. The communion of the Trinity is then their source of inspiration, plays a part in their protest, is a paradigm of what they are building.[526]

The Trinity is sometimes simply described as 'persons *in* relationship', where the focus is on the nature of the persons involved in the relationships.[527] The understanding of 'person' or 'Person' has, however, changed very significantly since early formulations of the Trinity.[528] This means that today the word 'person' can be problematic if the way that its usage has significantly developed over the centuries is not taken into account.

'Person' can also be problematic in a number of ways considering relationships between disabled people and non-disabled people.[529] Some writers on disability doubt that the personhood of disabled people has been considered carefully enough. Sometimes it is not

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[525] (Fiddes, 2014, p. 179; Holmes, 2012b, p. 9f; Sutcliffe-Pratt, 2017, p. 8)

[526] (Boff, 1988, p. 163)

[527] When discussing God as Trinity, the image of a triangle often springs to mind, and the focus is on the nature of the 'divine persons', which form the corners of the triangle. I am not intending to reject all use of the term 'person' but seeking to balance the over-emphasis on 'persons' through an investigation of the nature of relation and relationships, which might be said to form the sides of the triangle. (Reinders, 2008, pp. 248-252) argues for a move away from focusing on persons towards a greater emphasis on relationships. Fiddes's approach makes this move explicit.

[528] (Grenz, 2001; Gunton, 1993; Holmes, 2012b, 2014) Elsewhere Holmes argues that the difference between fourth and twentieth century understandings of 'person' and other terms means that the Classic Trinity and the Social Trinity are incompatible with each other (Holmes, 2009, pp. xvi, 195, 198f; 2012b). (Biggar, 2004; O'Donovan, 1984) both argue that restricting 'person' to human beings who meet a list of criteria is problematic, seeking instead an understanding of persons *as* relational.

[529] See Chapter 3 concerning whether disabled and non-disabled people are like or unlike, Chapter 4 concerning whether the 'problem' is individual impairments or social attitudes, Chapter 5 concerning whether disabled people are equally included by God. (O'Donovan, 1984, pp. 50-51) notes that the origins of 'person' in the mask worn by actors assumes agency by the character being portrayed. When 'persons' are defined in terms of being autonomous agents, severely disabled people (with physical and/or learning disabilities) may be excluded, see (Reinders, 2008). This in turn causes problems for disability theologies that rely on disabled people being active agents see (Reinders, 2008; Swinton, 2011). Hauerwas suggests abandoning the concept of 'person' while Anderson, in response to Hauerwas, recognises that although the historical understanding is problematic, the alternative of community story and character is not a viable solution (Anderson, 2004; Hauerwas, 1975/2004).

clear that the term 'person' is inclusive of disabled people at all. For this reason, if no other, it is doubtful whether the concept of a Social Trinity is a good starting point at all, if we are serious about the inclusion of disabled people in faith communities.

6.3.2 Persons as Relation

A key characteristic of Fiddes's understanding of God as Trinity concerns relationality, especially between its 'persons'. He writes: "… It is not human individual persons but relations between them, in all their diversity and depth, that offers a helpful analogy to what we call divine 'person'."[530]

Fiddes proposes a shift of emphasis, from 'persons *in* relation' to 'persons *as* relation', which enables him to prioritise the centrality of relationships.[531] If we speak not simply about an analogy between God and human beings, but also in terms of relationships, new possibilities begin to take shape.[532] The models of a Social Trinity and a Relational Trinity are, at root, both relational. A clear focus on the nature of the relations, however, is particularly helpful when it comes to relationships between disabled and non-disabled people.

Alistair McFadyen, in *The Call to Personhood*,[533] focuses on the communications between individuals as central to shaping who we are as persons. The communication needs to be much more than simply verbal.[534] Communications have the possibility to 'distort'[535] or 'undistort'[536] relations, and this can have serious consequences for people with disabilities. If

[530] (Fiddes, 2014, p. 105)
[531] (Fiddes, 2000; 2014, pp. 171-174; Gunton, 1993, 2007; Holmes, 2012b; Molnar, 2014) all discuss issues of what form of divine/creation analogy is appropriate. (Sexton, 2010) discusses Grenz's use of *analogia relationis* (social or relational analogy) over *analogia entis* (analogy of being) which grounds *imago Dei* in relationship or community. See (Fiddes, 2014, p. 171f) discussion of analogy of relations.
[532] The nature of personhood and embodiment can never be completely removed from any discussion of the nature of disability and the inclusion of disabled people.
[533] (McFadyen, 1990)
[534] For instance, Colin Gunton's proposal for 'persons *in* relationship' could be interpreted as restricting communication to speech when he says 'We know people in relationship: they speak, we respond.' (Gunton, 2007, p. 135). Rather than talking of 'communication' it is better to talk about relations between people, which can include passive forms, see (Biggar, 2004; O'Donovan, 1984).
[535] (McFadyen, 1990, p. 314) defines distorted communication as: "Any communication in which either communicator or recipient is intended as an object of communication. Where this is deliberate, the communication will be orientated towards the misunderstanding and manipulation of the recipient by keeping real intentions and interests guiding the communication private."
[536] (McFadyen, 1990, p. 319) defines undistorted communication as: "Communication which recognises and intends both oneself and others as autonomous subjects of communication whose realities are to some degree independent of one another and which can only be known through their independent self-communication: the communication is therefore undertaken in recognition of the other's independence and mystery and provides space in the relation for the other's free communication."

we are to encourage participatory inclusion, we need mutual, reciprocal, undistorted communications and relationships.[537] Even then, if too much emphasis is put on humans as autonomous and centred beings, some disabled people may find themselves excluded from such a definition of person.[538] This chapter is based on the belief that the shift Fiddes proposes from 'persons *in* relationship' to 'persons *as* relation' provides a solid grounding for further exploration of the relationships between disabled and non-disabled people, as no different from any other human relationships.[539]

6.3.3 Participation

'Participation' is a key word in the work of Paul Fiddes. He writes:

> … the point of Trinitarian language is not to provide an example to copy, but to draw us into participation in God, out of which human life can be transformed. But the language of Trinity certainly encourages the values of relationship, community and mutuality between persons. It is about interdependence and not domination.[540]

In this quotation, Fiddes puts clear water between his own understanding of God as Trinity and existing models of a Social Trinity. His use of the term *perichoresis* is especially important.[541]

The idea of *perichoresis* has been one of the ways, according to Dan Sutcliffe-Pratt, that theologians explore a "… relationship between God-in-eternity and God-in-salvation."[542] It is an important tool for exploring how 'three-ness' actually works in the concept of a triune God.[543] In a much-quoted definition, Catherine LaCugna writes:

> *Perichoresis* means being-in-one-another, permeation without confusion. No person exists by him/herself or is referred to him/herself; this would produce number and

[537] In Chapter 7 I explore friendship in terms of mutuality, intentionality and particularity, which fosters such communication.
[538] This is particularly true when McFadyen defines being 'autonomous' as entering relations and communications as an independent and free subject, and 'centred' as an individual in terms of autonomy and the "… achievement of organising one's life from an organisational locus within oneself" (McFadyen, 1990, p. 312). The potential denial of personhood would be particularly critical if communication with those with severe disabilities was denied, since he argues that communication and relationship enable personhood to develop (McFadyen, 1990, pp. 69-109).
[539] There is some evidence that equivalence between disabled and non-disabled people has been assumed when this is not the case (Asbjørnslett, Engelsrud, & Helseth, 2012).
[540] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 66)
[541] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 71f; Grenz, 2001, p. 163f; Sexton, 2014, pp. 175-176, 195-196, 114-115, 119-120, 128-129, 116-118, 125-148, 169-195) Contributors to the latter describe the terms: perichoresis, Social Trinity, Classical Trinity.
[542] (Sutcliffe-Pratt, 2017, p. 8) and discussed by (Grenz, 2001, p. 163f)
[543] (Cunningham, 1998, p. 180)

> therefore division within God. Rather, to be a divine person is to be by nature in relation to other persons.[544]

This is certainly what those using the phrase 'persons *in* relationship' suggest, and the term has been used by proponents of a Social Trinity.[545] Fiddes's use of 'persons *as* relation' and 'participation in God' take the Social Trinity approach a stage further.[546]

In fourth century discussions about God's being (*ousia*) as a "… communion of persons …",[547] Fiddes highlights that "… the verb *choreo* was sometimes used to express the way that each person 'penetrated', 'filled' or was 'contained' in the others."[548] In later centuries, Fiddes says, the term *perichoresis* came to express "… the permeation of each person by the other, their coinherence without confusion."[549]

Fiddes is keen to point out a common misunderstanding around the word *perichoresis.* Contrary to a much-used assumption, *perichoresis* is not derived from the verb "… to dance around."[550] Fiddes does not question that the metaphor of dance, sometimes used in the Middle Ages by making a connection with *perichoresis*, is a powerful way of thinking about the nature of God, and our relationship with God.[551] The idea of 'dancing with God' is such a powerful motif throughout Fiddes's *Participating in God* that Richard Kidd suggests it is:

> … a motif that resurfaces … as a crucial metaphor for exploring its diverse themes. Whether it is intercessory prayer, the problems of suffering and death, forgiveness, or spiritual gifts and sacraments, ripples originating from this seminal section are key to the way in which Fiddes illuminates his contribution to pastoral doctrine.[552]

While the metaphor of dance is very significant, however, it not without problems when applied to issues of disability; as I have already highlighted, it is all too easy for metaphorical language to be used and abused in this particular context.[553] Because I literally cannot

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[544] (Sutcliffe-Pratt, 2017, p. 9) quoting (LaCugna, 1993). This definition is also quoted by (McCall, 2010, p. 157).
[545] Moltmann, Boff, Cunningham are cited by (Sutcliffe-Pratt, 2017, pp. 9-11).
[546] (LaCugna, 1993, p. 243f) uses the phrase 'persons as relation' [deliberate use of plain font] although she is taking this to mean persons being constituted by relationships with other persons. This appears to be what is argued for in (Coombe, 2019, p. 3).
[547] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 71)
[548] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 71)
[549] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 71) He comments that two Latin terms were used to stress a state of being (*circumsessio*) and a state of doing (*circumincessio*).
[550] *Perichoreuo*, which Fiddes points out is related to *choreia* from which we derive 'choreography' (Fiddes, 2000, p. 72).
[551] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 72)
[552] (Kidd, 2014, p. 4)
[553] The issues most obviously arise with the use of metaphors of sight/blindness and hearing/Deafness with regards to understanding/not understanding. See discussion on page 58.

dance, the metaphorical concept is inevitably alien to me. It is also true, however, that some wheelchair users do physically dance at competition level. Despite any reservations that I might have, Kidd rightly suggests that the motif of the dance, suggested by *perichoresis*, directly addresses a range of theological and pastoral concerns. I suggest below how these significantly influence the inclusion of disabled people.

The shift from 'persons *in* relationship' to 'persons *as* relation' enables us to leave behind any concerns about the personhood of disabled people, and to focus on the relations they have with other people. Fiddes is able to clarify this further using the metaphor of dance. When we think about dance, there is a tendency to focus on the dancers. When it comes to the 'divine dance', Fiddes suggests that the focus shifts to "… perichoretic *movements* in human life, not with the *movers*."[554] This is helpful when considering the participatory inclusion of disabled people, because the focus shifts to their dynamic relationships with other people, and participation in the divine life.

Fiddes puts it like this:

> The Father sends forth the Son and then the Spirit through the Son, so that the Father is the cause both of the other persons and their communion. The persons are 'in' each other and permeate each other, but the source of this mutual penetration is the Father's ecstatic love.[555]

He then uses the metaphor of a dance as a way to highlight the broad differences between Eastern and Western ways of speaking about God as Trinity. The Eastern tradition emphasises a dynamic relationality between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. This lends itself to an image of an open 'progressive dance', in which God reaches out and draws us all into the relations within God's trinitarian life. The Western approach is more like a closed 'circle dance' among equal participants. This distinction is clearly promising as a way into understanding the participatory inclusion of disabled people.

The Western tradition takes us part of the way: emphasising some elements of participation, equality and reciprocity. If, however, we stay with the image of a 'circle dance', we quickly see that this could introduce problems for our inclusion of people with disabilities. Circle dancers face inwards, with a strong impetus to maintain the integrity of the circle at all cost.

[554] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 72) (Italics original)
[555] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 75)

If we think of a church community as an inward facing circle, it would be relatively easy to exclude disabled people, and others on the margins, from participation in such a dance. If, instead, the dance is a 'progressive dance' into which others are invited, then it becomes possible to imagine the life of the church as open to the inclusion of those on the margins. Kidd says that in the progressive dance:

> … breaking the circle is actually necessary to enable the complex weaving and exchanging that makes the dance progress. This kind of dance invites a much more dynamic metaphor and opens the possibility of conceiving a very different understanding of God's relationship with the world and its creatures.[556]

An example comes to mind as we run with these images of a church as either an exclusive 'circle dance' that generates exclusion, or a 'progressive dance' that actually encourages inclusion. The 'excluding circle' reminds me of those Baptist churches that, historically, have opted for 'closed membership', requiring believers to be baptised by full immersion on confession of faith before reception into membership. If this was rigorously applied to disabled people, elderly people, and others for whom immersion in water is simply not possible, they would find themselves excluded from membership and full participation in the life of a church.[557] This could be considered an example of a 'circle dance' at its very worst. As a wheelchair user, I was baptised as an adult upon confession of my faith in God in the Anglican Church I attended as a University student in the 1980s. Making arrangements to baptise me by immersion proved impractical at that time. When I sought membership of a Baptist church in the 1990s, one that had been founded in the early nineteenth century as a closed membership church, it was agreed that my earlier Anglican baptism could be recognised as valid, because I would have been immersed then had it been a viable option.[558] This, I suggest, was an example of a church modelling itself much more clearly on a 'progressive dance'. Had there not been flexibility and a willingness to 'break the circle', I would have been excluded from membership, and the possibility of becoming an elder, and eventually an ordained minister, would have been closed down.[559]

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[556] (Kidd, 2014, p. 13)

[557] (Whitt, 2012)

[558] The Baptist church where I am currently a member is constructing a new church building which has provision for the temporary installation of a hoist system to allow people with restricted mobility to be lowered into the baptistry. It is a significant challenge to fit such equipment to an existing building.

[559] When people did not want to be baptised by immersion without a physical or other significant reason for this not being possible then supplementary membership was possible. This enabled participation in all aspects of the life of the church except leadership roles.

6.4 Theological Implications for Disability Theologies

I now want to look at the theological implications arising from Fiddes's understanding of God as Trinity, especially where it can be shown that it strengthens the argument for participatory inclusion of disabled people.[560] It is important to put the emphasis on God's 'being with' us and our 'being with' one another.

Sam Wells, in his book *The Nazareth Manifesto*,[561] argues strongly for an emphasis on 'being with' other people, rather than 'working/being for' or even 'working with' them.[562] 'Working for' in a asymmetric relationship, lacking dialogue, Wells argues, puts too much emphasis on solving problems for other people.[563] We have already met this, enshrined in the Individual/Medical Model of Disability, and seen how it turns pastoral care into something that churches do for disabled people.[564] Wells would say that, although 'being for' others has its place, it has serious limitations. It perpetuates the distance between self and other, expecting others to do the work of inclusion, and it merely enhances the powerlessness of those who become the objects of 'being for'.[565] He argues that 'working with' encourages some degree of collaboration, which can enable the empowerment of oppressed and marginalised people. There are echoes here of liberation theology's emphasis on empowering the poor. There remains, however, work to be done to break the emphasis on problem-solving that easily inhibits true identification with those in need.[566]

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[560] Fiddes addresses the point of intercessory prayer; the problem of suffering; the practise of forgiveness; the threat of death; spiritual gifts; and our involvement with the incarnate God and sacramental life. (Fiddes, 2000) Chapters 4–9 respectively address these areas. (Fiddes, 2003, pp. 57, 185-192) refers to baptism and communion as 'sacraments' and for a discussion of Baptist Sacramentalism and covenant see (Brewer, 2009).

[561] (Wells, 2015)

[562] Wells suggests that 'being with' has been overlooked for a number of reasons: isolation rather than mortality is the real issue we face; relationships are seen as a means not an end; Scripture has been interpreted as God acting for us rather than being with us; a focus on Jesus's three years of ministry 'working for' people; the way the other approaches validate the helper (Wells, 2015, pp. 123-124).

[563] (Wells, 2015, pp. 101-109)

[564] Although disability is only mentioned briefly in *The Nazareth Manifesto* (p36), Wells seeks to apply the significance of 'being with' disabled people in his book *Incarnational Ministry: being with the Church* (Wells, 2017, pp. 43-62, 185-200). Although the tone of voice indicates 'being for' disabled people rather than 'being with', he writes as a non-disabled academic, albeit with a strong pastoral concern for others. This concern was raised above, on pages 83f, regarding the issue of disabled or non-disabled authors of disability theologies. In *Incarnational Ministry: being with the World* (Wells, 2018) he touches on disability, giving a brief example of the relationship between a 'caregiver' and a paralyzed man from the book *Me before You* by JoJo Moyes and in the 2011 film *The Untouchables*. (Jacobs, 2019) argues that the dominance of a pastoral care approach to disabled people is a major barrier to their participatory inclusion.

[565] (Wells, 2015, pp. 117-123)

[566] (Wells, 2015, pp. 113-117)

Wells examines three key aspects of 'being with': the inner life of 'God with God' in the Trinity, Jesus's incarnation as an expression of 'God with us', and the out-pouring of the Holy Spirit as a continuation of 'God with us'. He finds the theme of 'being with' pervading Christian ideas about creation, atonement, ecclesiology and eschatology.[567] It is the recognition of God 'being with' us that is highlighted by Fiddes' emphasis on our participation with God and the inner life of the Trinity.

Although Wells finds 'being with' at the heart of the concept of Trinity, he tends to focus more on the Triune God as a whole, rather than on the persons of the Trinity 'with' one another.[568] He puts particular importance on the life of Jesus, the thirty years that are often overlooked. For Wells, it is this whole thirty years of 'being with' people that is the key to understanding the final three years of 'doing with' and 'doing for', eventually culminating in the cross and subsequent resurrection.[569] During his three years of public ministry, there are still many examples of Jesus 'being with' those that the religious authorities typically marginalised or excluded. Jesus's continued presence, post-Pentecost, through the Holy Spirit, then provides a template for our 'being with' others.[570] In the particularity of events in the life of Jesus, Wells is also able to find important examples of genuine mutuality in the relationships that are formed. It might be helpful to think of relationships as a spectrum of ways that non-disabled people relate to those with disabilities: 'working for' is the least desirable, or a 'distorting' relationship; 'being for' and 'working with', through campaigning and advocacy, is an improvement; 'being with' is preferable, since it is an 'undistorting' relationship.[571] While each of these approaches have their place, they need to be grounded in the radical 'being with' of God and one another that Fiddes proposes.[572]

[567] (Wells, 2015, p. 11)
[568] (Wells, 2015, p. 124ff) The characteristics Wells addresses are presence, attention, mystery, delight, participation, partnership, enjoyment and glory.
[569] (Wells, 2015, pp. 147-150) Wells does acknowledge that this is partly an argument from silence as the Gospel accounts largely ignore this period.
[570] (Wells, 2015, pp. 160-169)
[571] In other contexts, each of these four modes may be more or less suitable. Wells illustrates this using the example of homelessness (Wells, 2015, pp. 20-22).
[572] Wells argues that these modes are grounded in the life of Christ, mostly spent 'being with' us and then 'working for' us in his ministry, death and resurrection (Wells, 2015, pp. 23-27).

One of the recurring factors that distorts relationships between disabled and non-disabled people, especially in church contexts, concerns assumptions about healing.[573] These assumptions are usually informed by particular interpretations of the Bible: how healing passages are expounded in preaching; whether and how much disabled people suffer; and the nature of suffering itself.[574] These attitudes and assumptions can determine how non-disabled people pray for and with disabled people. Particular understandings of the nature and purpose of spiritual gifts and attitudes towards the beginning and ending of life also have a major effect on the way people articulate their prayers.[575]

6.4.1 Intercessions

It is widely assumed that in intercessory prayer we are praying '*to* God and *for* other people'. This has often been taken to mean non-disabled people praying *for* disabled people, seeking healing or relief from actual or perceived suffering.[576] There is an expectation that God is the only source of a solution, either through healing or other interventions, and that we ourselves are not in any significant way responsible for working to transform the lives of disabled people.[577] Fiddes calls this form of prayer the 'Two-Cause' theory,[578] which places the onus for change on God and not on people. It absolves disabled and non-disabled people from seeking solutions to issues that need to be addressed. In total, Fiddes identifies four different approaches to intercessory prayer. Another approach, the 'Inner Transformation' theory,[579] understands prayer as primarily changing the person who prays, which would leave those who are prayed for unchanged. A third approach understands God's actions in the world as general rather than particular. This might address general issues of injustice and

[573] (Black, 1996, pp. 11-18; Creamer, 2009, pp. 3-4, 53-56; Eiesland, 1994, pp. 51-53, 70-75, 116-118; Jacobs, 2016; Lewis, 2007, pp. 61-66; Pailin, 1992, pp. 66-91; Reynolds, 2008, pp. 25-30, 35-42) all discuss the problematic assumptions concerning disabled people 'needing' healing.

[574] (Yong, 2014) challenges the assumption that disabled people suffer, recognising that disabled people experience existential suffering by exclusion and social stigma rather than from their impairments. An emphasis on working with disabled people enables a more inclusive holistic pastoral theology to be developed. He notes the importance of relationships and friendship between disabled and non-disabled people.

[575] (Fiddes, 2000, pp. 115-302) I have omitted his chapter on 'The threat of death' as not being relevant to my argument.

[576] (Wells, 2015, p. 117) Wells argues that intercession is an example of 'being for' others when it is not possible to 'be with' them.

[577] This approach has many echoes of the Individual/Medical Model of Disability.

[578] (Fiddes, 2000, pp. 116-124) God is the primary cause of everything, working either through secondary causes or directly. He suggests this approach is particularly problematic with regards to the relationship between science and faith.

[579] (Fiddes, 2000, pp. 124-126) Fiddes questions whether this approach "… does justice to the notion of God's having a purpose at all." (p. 128).

discrimination, but it leaves particular situations unresolved.[580] None of these three approaches are able to effectively transform the experience of intercessory prayer from 'doing for' to 'being with'. Only in a fourth approach, 'divine action as persuasion', do we begin to see the potential for disabled and non-disabled people to engage together in prayer, aspiring together for transformation.[581]

In this fourth approach to intercessory prayer, God is thought to act with human beings and the world through cooperation and participation rather than force or coercion. Fiddes puts it like this:

> If 'persons' in God are relations in which created beings participate, they will be not only activities in God but actions in the world.[582]

These 'actions in the world' are effected through those who have been "… persuaded and moved to certain ends."[583] In this model, both disabled and non-disabled people are involved in actions and changes of attitude, born out of 'being with' one another and God. Returning to the image of the dance, we find that both disabled and non-disabled people are involved together in a participatory dance in God.[584] This understanding of intercession holds together the idea of God's general aims, such as seeking justice and equality for disabled people, and God's particular aims for specific people and situations, such as enabling disabled people to participate in a local church community.[585] Furthermore, this model provides a different way to understand prayer for healing, as an expression of our love and God's love where outcomes are not restricted to particular physical healings of impairment. Fiddes writes:

> Healing for individuals and society comes through partnership between Creator and creation, and prayer is a means of entering such a partnership.[586]

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[580] (Fiddes, 2000, pp. 126-130) discusses the use of the 'General Purpose' theory.
[581] (Fiddes, 2000, pp. 131-148) discusses 'Divine Action as Persuasion', an approach grounded in process theology. See (R. Ellis, 2005, p. 144f) where he argues that persuasion is a far more satisfactory understanding than coercion, which I discuss below.
[582] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 133)
[583] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 133)
[584] There are several integrated dance companies where disabled and non-disabled people perform together in a symbolic example of this participation.
[585] (Fiddes, 2000, pp. 133-134)
[586] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 138)

Rather than physical healing being the primary aim of intercession *by* non-disabled people *for* disabled people, healing becomes the undistorting of relationships that occurs when disabled and non-disabled people enter together into partnerships with God.[587]

There are questions raised by this understanding of intercession as God acting through persuasion, and Fiddes typically addresses them in detail.[588] A particular question concerning the relationship between disabled and non-disabled people is what it might mean for love to be a motivation for prayer. Fiddes says:

> If divine activity takes this form [persuasion], then as we pray we add the persuasive power of our love to God's. That is, in praying for others we are expressing our love and concern for them.[589]

This might make sense when disabled and non-disabled people are already in some kind of relationship, but is harder to understand when disabled people are distanced by being seen as 'other'. Something similar arose when I was exploring McFadyen's understanding of persons achieving personhood through dialogue with others. If people refuse such dialogue, however, the denial of personhood becomes a real possibility. Both of these concerns are addressed by putting the emphasis on God's initiative. If it is God's love that draws people into dialogue and personhood, this has the potential to embrace both non-disabled and disabled people in a partnership with Godself, in turn generating love and concern for one another.

The idea of persuasion can be illustrated by a practical example of prayer in a service of worship. Very often, people have been asked why they want prayer, and God has been asked to bring that request to fruition.[590] It would be possible, however, to symbolise our partnership with God and one another by expressing our love and concern for one another, expecting God's response to arise through our relationships together. Following Wells, this genuinely reinforces a sense of 'being with' one another, and can lead to a greater

[587] (Black, 1996, pp. 44-53; Lewis, 2007, pp. 149-154; Reynolds, 2008, pp. 197f, 214-216, 219f) all argue that the restoring of relationships with God and other people is a significant form of healing.
[588] (Fiddes, 2000, pp. 139-144) He addresses three issues: God's power as creator; whether God's divine purpose can ever be fulfilled; and whether God knows the future. These are not pertinent at this point.
[589] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 136)
[590] (Wells, 2015, pp. 292-293) suggests that to pray in this way is praying for resurrection, for God to heal or cure the person being prayed for.

understanding of each person's experience and needs. It can lead to a transformed experience of inclusion, through relationships with God and others.[591]

Robert Ellis's *Answering God*[592] surveys a number of understandings of intercessory prayer that can be found in the Bible. These can shape the inclusion of disabled people. Ellis examines how key theologians have interpreted such prayers. Intercessory prayer, he suggests, falls into two broad approaches: subjective accounts, in which 'we answer God',[593] and objective, in which 'God answers us'.[594]

I suggest that, in the context of disability, subjective accounts are those in which non-disabled people either seek that God 'does for' disabled people or enables them to 'do for' disabled people. Positively, Ellis notes that subjective prayer changes the pray-er, and that this may lead to a change of attitude towards disabled people. More negatively, however, he is critical of Kant's argument that prayer should be seen as a 'therapeutic meditation', that through prayer we change ourselves, "… meditating on the good and so become good … [leading to …] the relegation of God from the process. ."[595] Ellis suggests that our prayers for others will change nothing other than our acceptance or denial of the *status quo*.

Ellis handles objective accounts by using a process model similar to that of Paul Fiddes. There is radical connectedness between all entities, which suggests powerful connections with those for whom we pray. This underpins a desirable move away from 'doing for' to 'being with' others. Ellis suggests that "… there is a sense in which our prayers do create opportunities for God's persuasive love."[596] Ellis has no time for an 'Origenest' approach to intercession, which simply portrays prayer as part of God's pre-arranged plan. This would suggest that there is little that prayer can do to transform an experience of exclusion into one of inclusion. As Ellis says, "… prayer becomes an illusion planted in the system in order to make human pray-ers thankful."[597]

[591] (Wells, 2015, pp. 294-295) Wells describes these as prayers of incarnation and prayers of transfiguration.
[592] (R. Ellis, 2005) see above.
[593] (R. Ellis, 2005, pp. 160-167) See (pp. 48f, 54f, 66f) for Ellis's discussion of Augustine, Kant and Calvin.
[594] (R. Ellis, 2005, pp. 167-178) See (p. 88f) for Ellis's discussion of Origen
[595] (R. Ellis, 2005, p. 162)
[596] (R. Ellis, 2005, p. 170)
[597] (R. Ellis, 2005, p. 175)

Ellis suggests that our prayers can rightly be seen as a response to God's invitation to participate in God's action in the world, as in an Open Theist framework.[598] He commends the idea that intercession be seen as participation with God in which "… the Spirit catches us up into a movement with the Son to the Father."[599] This relationship, I suggest, is very much what we see in expressions of friendship. Ellis says:

> The act of prayer is a way of claiming God's friendship for those who sigh and groan, it is even, we might suggest, a way of drawing others into the Trinitarian fellowship, or into greater participation in the 'dance'.[600]

The mutual aspect of this shifts the emphasis away from non-disabled pray-ers 'doing for' disabled people, towards 'praying with' each other. This relationship is with "… the three-personal God who created human persons in the divine image [and who therefore] insists on treating us as active agents, called to participate [fully] in the life of God and the life of God's world."[601] Such a view enables disabled people to become agents of prayer with others rather than merely passive recipients. In Ellis's discussion of "… dialects of time, knowledge and power",[602] the question arises as to what extent God's action is dependent on our prayers. To counter the idea that God depends on whether or not we pray, for or with others, Ellis says: "… God retains the initiative at all times …"[603] through persuasion rather than coercion. This is vital for the inclusion of disabled people. In particular, it challenges the tendency for churches and individuals simply to maintain the *status quo*.[604]

As we have seen, healing is a recurrent theme concerning the relationship between non-disabled people and disabled people. It is sometimes expressed by non-disabled people praying for the healing of disabled people, based on an assumption that this is what is needed, and that it is 'God's will'. Ellis suggests that while these prayers may appear unanswered, God does in fact answer by not acting according to our desires. He writes that we:

[598] (R. Ellis, 2005, pp. 178-200)
[599] (R. Ellis, 2005, p. 179)
[600] (R. Ellis, 2005, p. 182)
[601] (R. Ellis, 2005, p. 184)
[602] (R. Ellis, 2005, p. 186f)
[603] (R. Ellis, 2005, p. 190)
[604] There is always the risk that persuasion fails to achieve the desired outcome of inclusion.

> … also freely acknowledge that in every situation and in hearing every prayer it is very much the case that God always knows what is best, which prayer may and may not be responded to. Sometimes… the answering God may yet say 'no'.[605]

I was disappointed and, to some extent hurt, when others prayed for my own physical healing with no apparent effect. I have since come to accept the idea that God does indeed 'know what is best'. There are many aspects of my ministry, and perspectives I bring to this current research, which would not have been possible if I had actually experienced physical healing. Ellis does not, however, rule out that intercessory prayers may be ineffective because of "… the 'principalities and powers' that thwart the ultimate purposes of God".[606]

Ellis suggests that monarchical views of God typically lead to exclusive prayers:

> … as if God has only *one* thing for us at any one moment when actually God might offer to us a number of equally "good" possibilities and be as concerned for the "how" of our decisions and actions as the "what", wanting us to grow… taking responsibility and becoming adult.[607]

In light of my experience above, the important issue is not *what* is prayed for and the particular outcome, but *how* the outcome enables disabled people to grow in faith and to minister alongside other people.

6.4.2 Suffering

The experience of suffering is tackled in several theologies of disability, as are false assumptions that disabled people suffer in ways peculiar to people with disabilities.[608] In reality, disabled people suffer in much the same way as non-disabled people do, and the wider context of this issue needs to be addressed. [609]

The reality of suffering presents a very significant challenge when it comes to a shift from 'being/doing for' to 'being with' others, and Wells addresses that.[610] He suggests that there are three commonly identified sources of suffering: our own folly, ignorance and sin; the

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[605] (R. Ellis, 2005, p. 192)
[606] (R. Ellis, 2005, p. 193)
[607] (R. Ellis, 2005, p. 199) (Quote marks original)
[608] (Black, 1996, pp. 19-33; Creamer, 2009, pp. 75-80; Lewis, 2007, p. 73f; Pailin, 1992, pp. 38-65; Reynolds, 2008, pp. 25-31, 35, 42-23, 159-168, 209-111) Among these, only Reynolds recognises the importance of God suffering with us.
[609] (Pailin, 1992, pp. 38-65) discusses the various assumptions that disabled people suffer and the implications of this. (Creamer, 2009, pp. 75-80) argues that disabled people, along with other minority groups, are more likely to suffer discrimination and injustice. (Ryan, 2019) argues that disabled people suffer disproportionate economic hardship.
[610] (Wells, 2015, pp. 283-297)

folly, ignorance and sin of others; and "… the stuff that just happens … Breast cancer … Earthquakes … Floods …"[611] I would add accidents, illness and congenital conditions which result in embodied impairments.[612] Wells argues that the second of these is largely about distorted and broken relationships, and can be addressed through forgiveness, restoration, and 'being with' the other. The third concerns human limits, an issue that is addressed in the writings of Creamer.[613]

I can identify three responses to suffering, which do not easily map onto the sources of suffering as Wells has listed them: see if anything can be done, and if so address it; see if we can make sense of the suffering, for instance using the Christian narrative of the incarnation; and simply accept that "… there does not seem to be anything you or anyone else can do to alleviate it … no story that can make sense of it."[614] Wells is right to say that this is where people most easily feel abandoned by others, even their friends, at which point 'being with' others who are suffering is crucially important. It is, of course, a very difficult thing to do, and there will be situations when people are unable to rise to the challenge. The question then becomes, who is there to 'be with' those who are isolated in and by their suffering when it seems that nothing can be done? [615] A simple, but naive, response might be 'God is with you', but this needs handling with sensitivity and care. We need to be very clear about how we are understanding God and God's particular way of 'being with' those who are abandoned and isolated.

Fiddes sums up his own response like this:

> … the most adequate – or at least the least inadequate – theodicy is, I believe, the argument from free will; the theodicy of a suffering God is, I suggest, necessary to strengthen the free-will defence of the existence of evil. It is needed to make this defence credible.[616]

God's creation of a world in which we have genuine free will has serious consequences. Not only are we able to make choices to do both wrong and right, but our choices have an

[611] (Wells, 2015, p. 287)
[612] There is no person or event which can be 'blamed' for the medical condition that I have. See Appendix C, page 211.
[613] See the discussion of Creamer distinction between 'limitations' and 'limits' on pages 103f and 180f.
[614] (Wells, 2015, p. 290)
[615] (Wells, 2015, p. 290)
[616] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 163)

impact on the distortion or undistortion of relationships with others and God.[617] When our choices, deliberate or otherwise, distort our relationships, then we and others suffer. At the core of Fiddes's argument is his conviction that because all creation participates in God's life, when we suffer, God inevitably suffers with us. This is not imposed on God, but is a necessary consequence of God's self-chosen limitation.[618] When we frustrate the divine purpose, "… something strange and alien …"[619] emerges, "… the emergence of non-being raises the matter of divine *responsibility* for a broken world."[620] It is through the incarnation, and in particular through the events of the cross, that God has shown God's readiness to shoulder this responsibility.

Fiddes's focus on God's love, mutuality in relationships, and radical openness to creation has important pastoral implications. These are well-illustrated in Frances Young's account of her experience as a parent.[621] As the mother of Arthur, a profoundly disabled child, she came to recognise the 'duality of God'. On the one hand, there is an aspect of God which is "… detached, impassible, invulnerable",[622] and yet there is "… another aspect of God's being which is immersed in the world, and does suffer."[623] Fiddes's way of putting this is to say that we must "… distinguish between an untouchable essence of God and a divine Son who suffers … distinguishing between a Son who suffers and a Father who does not."[624]

Fiddes makes the point that "… within the divine *perichoresis*, all three persons suffer, but in different ways according to the distinction in relations."[625] This has significant pastoral implications, meaning that "… we too can lean our sufferings upon those of the Son, so that God suffers not only 'with' but 'as' and 'in' us in the interweaving of the divine dance."[626]

I agree with Fiddes when he says that "… there can be no complete theodicy."[627] We can, however, know that God is radically present 'with us' in times of suffering and is committed to suffer with us. This is a powerful response to the offensive idea that God allows or even

[617] Distorted relationships reinforce 'doing for' others while undistorted relationships foster 'being with' others.
[618] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 164)
[619] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 166)
[620] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 168)
[621] Recounted in her book *Face to Face* (Young, 1990).
[622] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 180)
[623] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 180)
[624] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 183)
[625] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 184)
[626] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 186)
[627] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 186)

causes people, disabled people among them, to suffer in the cause of some inexplicable 'good'.[628] It is important to be able to link the idea of God 'working for' with an equally significant reality that God is 'being with' us and the whole of creation.

Wells suggests three forms of prayer that are possible responses to the reality of suffering: seeking resurrection by interceding for healing; seeking incarnation by being with others as we intercede; seeking transfiguration, particularly of situations when there seems to be little or nothing we can do, either for or with, others.[629] The limitations of all our responses become most evident when the challenge of being with others is too great and, at that point, we are most reliant on God's 'being with' us.

6.4.3 Forgiveness

There can be little doubt that there is a strong case that non-disabled people should be seeking forgiveness for the exclusion of disabled people, as is clear from previous chapters. There is possibly also the need for disabled people to forgive churches and society for their experience of exclusion. This is a complex matter, however, and does not lend itself to a simple symmetrical solution.

I began this thesis by describing a journey through the landscape of disability. Historically, this journey has been travelled, often separately, by both disabled people and non-disabled people.[630] Their respective journeys have, therefore, resulted in very different perspectives, of one another and of the landscape. The metaphor of a journey as a voyage with God is helpfully explored by Fiddes, in his exploration of our experience of God's love, and the nature of forgiveness.[631]

Miroslav Volf, in *Exclusion and Embrace*,[632] writes from his personal perspective on the need to overcome the deep divisions between different ethnic groups after the Balkan conflict in the 1990s.[633] There is, Volf argues, a need for mutual forgiveness, to bring reconciliation

[628] (Pailin, 1992, pp. 66-91) argues that disability is not the will of God. He gives examples of poor theology of disability, such as disabled people being a means of teaching patience and care.
[629] (Wells, 2015, pp. 292-296)
[630] Even when travelling together, disabled and non-disabled people have often been strangers rather than companions or friends.
[631] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 191f) recognises the challenge of offering and accepting forgiveness as a 'painful journey' (p. 192).
[632] (Volf, 1996)
[633] He writes as a Croat, living and working in the USA. In 1993 he was challenged by Jürgen Moltman "But can you embrace a četnik?" referring to Serbian fighters in the Balkan conflict (Volf, 1996, p. 9).

between the warring factions in the former Yugoslavia.[634] He makes particular use of the concepts of 'making space' for the other and 'double vision'.[635] Regarding the first, Volf suggests that we need to intentionally:

> … give ourselves to others and 'welcome' them, to readjust our identities to make space for them… prior to any judgement about others, except that of identifying them in their humanity.[636]

Regarding the second, Volf says that:

> … we enlarge our thinking by letting the voices and perspectives of others, especially those with whom we may be in conflict, resonate with ourselves, by allowing them to help us see them, as well as ourselves, from *their* perspective, and if needed, readjust our perspective, readjust our perspectives as we take into account their perspective.[637]

It is possible, I think, to apply his approach to reconciliation between disabled and non-disabled people, particularly within the framework of the Minority Group Model of Disability. It is clear what it might mean for disabled people to forgive non-disabled people. Disabled people offer forgiveness to non-disabled people, and non-disabled people receive this. They both commit to a journey to seek mutual understanding. This mutual process of forgiveness, of giving and receiving, enables both disabled and non-disabled people to begin a journey together.

Fiddes, using a related metaphor, writes:

> The voyage of forgiveness points to atonement as having the power that flows from participation. It points to the transforming effect of sharing the experience and feelings of another.[638]

The nature of forgiveness is essentially mutual, since there must be movements from both the forgiver and the one who is forgiven. Fiddes suggests that this must involve a two-stage process: a voyage of discovery and a journey of endurance. While the first stage starts by recognising the experience, feelings and response of the forgiver, it has to go beyond this to begin to understand something from the perspective of the one who is forgiven. Through

[634] (Volf, 1996, pp. 111-140) Forgiveness is one of the four 'moments of embrace'; the others being repentance, making space in oneself for the other, and healing of memory.
[635] (Volf, 1996, pp. 125-131, 250-123)
[636] (Volf, 1996, p. 29)
[637] (Volf, 1996, p. 213)
[638] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 197)

this process, the restoration of relationships can get under way, and the one who is forgiven can begin to understand the forgiver's perspective, through their own voyage of discovery. When this is done, there is less likelihood of repetition, because a deeper mutual understanding has begun to take over. As an example, at a conference that I attended, a visiting speaker with a very different cultural background referred to disabled people as 'cripples' and 'the handicapped', something that I and several others found offensive. Rather than remonstrating with the speaker, I entered into a dialogue. I discovered that he was simply using terms in the way he had been taught from school days, while learning the English language. He was, in fact, using a direct translation of a term used in his mother tongue. He in turn was able to appreciate that terminology in the UK had changed, and was able to use more appropriate language from that time on. Our relationship had been restored, and both of us had learnt from the other, opening pathways to transformation.

Fiddes's perspective on forgiveness has real potential for transformation of individuals and their relationships with others and of the communities that they are part of. This happens when forgiveness is seen as a journey which involves travelling with the other and entering into dialogue to seek greater understanding and inclusion.

6.4.4 Spiritual Gifts

If disabled people are perceived simply as passive members of a church community, they become limited to the role of recipients of benefits from non-disabled people's gifts. This applies as much to so-called spiritual gifts as it does to gifts we might simply describe as natural.

Fiddes's suggestion that all gifts are movements of God's Spirit through people is a helpful perspective, and has direct relevance for disabled people and the particular gifts they can bring to church communities.[639] Using the powerful metaphor of the Spirit as Breath of Life, Fiddes says that we participate in God as the Spirit touches and fills us, bringing our abilities and talents into the life of God.[640] This approach provides an alternative to the idea that

[639] This counters the idea that disabled people are themselves gifts to the church (Pailin, 1992, pp. 92-122).
[640] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 254f) notes the connected meanings of the Hebrew (*ruach*), Greek (*pneuma*) and Latin (*spiritus*).

some gifts are 'natural' and others are considered to be 'spiritual', since all are forms of participation with God.[641]

When gifts are seen as the outworking of the life of the Spirit within all with whom God has a relationship, then disabled people can be understood to be gifted alongside others through their participation in the life of a church community.[642] Romans 12:4-11 says that the wide variety of gifts have the one source, the Spirit, and are given by God working with each and every person as God chooses. God's gifting is for the benefit of the community of faith, not for particular individuals, and is to be exercised in relationship with others. In other words, gifts as an expression of God's 'being with' us enables us to 'be with' others. There is no reason, then, why disabled people may not be full participants in the life of church communities as God calls and enables them. This applies across the board: from baptism and communion to all aspects of local and wider Baptist church life. If participation in God and with others in the life of the church is to be mutual, then the expression of gifts within the community must be mutual too. This usefully challenges any idea that some disabled people are 'given' to the church community to provide opportunities to learn how to care for others.[643]

6.4.5 Sacramental lives

The concept of 'persons *as* relation' enables an understanding of relationships within God that goes beyond what Martin Buber famously called 'I-Thou'. Rather it invites us to recognise a dynamic movement between 'I' and 'Thou' in which we, and indeed the whole of creation, also participate.[644] The church might then be described as a sacramental community, one in which we live sacramental lives, both through the observance of sacraments (or ordinances as many Christians call them), and through participation with one another in the life of God. Fiddes puts it like this:

> God *happens*, in the interweaving flow of relationships like those between a father and a son, opened up and deepened by the currents of the Spirit. This would lead us

[641] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 268f) This false divide can be problematic. For instance, my wife worked in finance for many years before qualifying as a chartered management accountant. She has only recently realised/acknowledged that this 'learnt' skill set is indeed a gifting from God, alongside gifting in hospitality for example. She is now exercising this gifting as church treasurer.
[642] (Fiddes, 2000, pp. 191-220) For a brief discussion on the relevance of *charismata* to the life of the church see (Fiddes, 2003, p. 67).
[643] (Eiesland, 1994, pp. 69-87; Pailin, 1992, pp. 92-122)
[644] (Fiddes, 2000, pp. 278-281)

> to an understanding of the sacraments as pieces of earthly stuff that are meeting places with this God who exists in ecstatic movements of love.[645]

There are historical differences of opinion among Baptists as to whether communion and baptism should be called sacraments or ordinances. This does not really alter the argument here. Baptism and The Lord's Supper, alongside preaching, have been central to the life of Baptist church communities, and all three can be seen as ways in which we enter and participate in a relationship with God. They are visible signs of God's grace in the world.[646]

Nancy Eiesland is keen to emphasise the importance of the participation of disabled people in communion. Communion is important, she says, because it is something we do alongside other people, rather than something we do alone.[647] It is preferable for disabled people to receive communion alongside others in the congregation, something that fits well with the Baptist practice of serving people in their seats, rather than needing to move to a communion rail.[648] More significantly perhaps, Eiesland's metaphor of the 'disabled God' reminds us that we are meeting with and participating in a relationship with a God who still visibly carries the marks of crucifixion.[649]

Kathy Black's emphasis on an 'interdependent God' underpins her concern with how the healing narratives of Jesus are preached.[650] She identifies two common approaches: literal and metaphorical interpretation.[651] Black expresses her concern that any emphasis on healing can easily lead to the exclusion of disabled people. Sometimes disabled people are excluded directly, sometimes their exclusion follows on from an assumption that they need to be healed before they can be included.[652] Black focused on only a small selection of

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[645] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 281)

[646](Fiddes, 2000, pp. 278-302) argues that communion and baptism are ways in which we enter into a relationship with God. (Goodliff, 2014) argues that preaching goes alongside communion and baptism as central to Baptist church life. (Fiddes, 2003, pp. 57, 185-192) refers to baptism and communion as 'sacraments'. (Aadne, 2020, p. 145) suggests that "… the life and practices of the local church are sacramental in nature, as they are derived from the church's life in covenant fellowship with the triune God." She later links this explicitly with Fiddes's understanding of our participating in the life of the Trinity. (p. 159)

[647] (Lewis, 2007, pp. 155-178) Some of the issues of making worship, including communion, accessible to Deaf people are similar to the practical implications for physically disabled people. She describes Deaf church as being much more participatory than hearing church.

[648] (Eiesland, 1994, pp. 111-116)

[649] (Eiesland, 1994, pp. 107-111, 118-119)

[650] See discussion in Chapter 5 on page 94.

[651] (Black, 1996, pp. 43-56) Having discussed these two approaches Black then applies them to a series of passages in subsequent chapters.

[652] Simon Horne argues that modern understandings and attitudes towards disability and disabled people have often been inappropriately imposed on biblical texts. Rather than disability being seen solely in terms of injury, he reveals aspects of blessing (Horne, 1999).

passages in the Gospels, which clearly leads to limitations.[653] Black and Eiesland both identify a number of issues that exclude disabled people, leaving them on the fringes of church communities. Black's response, however, is to seek a practical rather than theoretical solution.[654] She suggests an alternative 'healing homiletic', giving special attention to the way that passages concerned with blindness, Deafness, paralysis, leprosy, chronic illness, and mental illness are preached, and looking carefully at how Jesus relates with the disabled people that he meets, which I return to in the next chapter.[655] This helpfully shifts the focus away from the disabled person, the causes of their impairments, and whether there is any link between healing and forgiveness, and puts the emphasis on the relationship between Jesus and disabled people, once again reinforcing the shift from 'doing for' to 'being with'.

6.5 Pastoral Implications of a Relational Trinity

When it comes to the application of God as Trinity to pastoral situations, Fiddes defines the task as:

> … to develop a similar Trinitarian modelling, to have an image of God in our minds which will be adequate to support pastoral practise, when we are faced by demands upon us for which we need resources of faith.[656]

There are many pastoral implications in Fiddes's relational doctrine of the Trinity. Among them, many apply to disabled people and the relationship between disabled and non-disabled people. At the heart of the matter remain the concepts of 'persons *as* relation' and 'participation'.

6.5.1 Pastoral Implications of 'Persons as Relation'

Concerning personal language about God, Fiddes writes:

> There are, then, what seem to be intractable tensions in the relations between the individual and the community which arise in any building of relations with others. There is a need to create a balance between the person and personage, between self-integrity and openness to others, between independence and dependence, and between diversity and unity. In the face of these pastoral questions what is the place

[653] Black limits her attention to the healing narratives in the Gospel accounts. Naïve metaphorical interpretations can be as problematic as more literal approaches (Black, 1996, pp. 54-56). For instance feminist preaching on healing narratives, while trying to avoid problematic interpretations of physical healing can result in emphasising an anti-Jewish perspective (Belser & Morrison, 2011).
[654] She identifies: false links between faith and healing; assumptions about disability being God's will; disability as punishment for sin or a source of character development for disabled and non-disabled people (Black, 1996, pp. 23-33).
[655] See page 177.
[656] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 29)

> of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, which concerns a personal God who lives in relationships?[657]

This is the question addressed in this section. Fiddes's proposed use of the term 'persons *as* relation' addresses four pastoral concerns not previously addressed by Trinitarian doctrines. Fiddes shows that the concept of 'persons *as* relation' enables previously intractable issues to be addressed more effectively.[658] I will explore ways in which these are particularly relevant for the inclusion of disabled people.

The first takes up Fiddes's comment on the gap between 'persons' and 'personage'.[659] He is right that there is a dissonance between our identity as an individual ('person') and the way we present ourselves to others ('personage'). This is typically in the form of the masks we wear and roles we play and can easily form.[660] Fiddes puts it like this:

> … we are accorded a role by others which is a complex of attributes and behaviours expected of us by society and its institutions [including churches], against which our actual behaviour is judged.[661]

His conclusion is that the task for Christian ministers is to:

> … seek to enable someone to live in the interaction of the person and the personage, to become aware of the way he or she is using masks, to live in harmony between self and presentation. The problem is not the personage itself, the roles and rituals, but discord between the personage and the person.[662]

This issue is of particular concern for disabled people, not only because there is a tension between their identity as persons and how they present themselves in different contexts, but also because there is an additional tension between how disabled people present themselves and how non-disabled people expect disabled people to act.

This is problematic for disabled people because society generally has had, and continues to have, misleading views about who disabled people are and how they should act. This has

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[657] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 28)
[658] (Fiddes, 2000, pp. 19-27, 51-56)
[659] (Fiddes, 2000, pp. 19-22)
[660] Fiddes explores the origins of 'person' (*prosopon* in Greek and *persona* in Latin) to mean the masks worn by actors in the theatre (Fiddes, 2000, pp. 15-16). (O'Donovan, 1984, p. 50) also references this background in his exploration of the nature of personhood. The question began to be a part of theological reflection in the early church's debates about the nature of Christ. The impact of the changing understanding of these definitions runs through Holmes' work (Holmes, 2012b, 2014). Fiddes also refers to Goffman's work on the relation of 'the face' and 'the place', with a similar potential for dissonance (Fiddes, 2000, p. 21).
[661] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 21)
[662] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 21)

sometimes been known as the 'sick role',[663] which leads to expectations that disabled people will be passive and dependent on others. In church communities, this is what has led to disabled people being seen as 'passive recipients of pastoral care.'[664] This is at odds with how many disabled people see themselves and wish to be seen by others. I see myself, for example, as a 'non-disabled person who is sitting down' (in a wheelchair), and this influences the way I present myself to other people.[665] When people meet me, it is clear that their first response is not to see me as a 'non-disabled person sitting down' but as a 'disabled person, using a wheelchair, with a significantly different body shape'. This immediately gives rise to three sets of dissonances: between how I see myself and who I am; between how I present myself and how others see me; and between how I present myself and how others expect me to behave. While the focus remains on 'persons' and 'personages', these dissonances continue to be emphasised. When the focus is on 'relations' they become less significant. This is particularly true of friendship, in which the masks we wear are 'thinner' and we allow others to see more of the actual person behind the masks. This is a mutual process, but the particularity of friendships is also important, since the 'gap' is specific to each individual and relationship. This is reflected in the phrase I used earlier: 'When I am among friends, I am least disabled, when I am among strangers, I am most disabled'.[666]

Fiddes suggests that the doctrine of triune God "… encourages us to *discover* our roles as we participate in a God who is always in the movement of sending."[667]

On that basis, he can also argue that by being:

> … engaged in God's relational life we discover what roles the community requires, how it needs us to 'represent' the signs of Christ in order to be a community open to the needs of all. We can also discover how to resist false expectations and type-casting, to reject the masks that others want us to wear for their own satisfaction.[668]

This is particularly important for disabled people, who have too often had the roles they play imposed upon them by others. I have already looked at the various barriers to the

[663] (Barnes & Mercer, 2010, pp. 43-45)
[664] (Jacobs, 2019, pp. 44-50, 143-174, 192-202)
[665] I self-identify primarily in terms of relationships, with God and with other people, rather than being 'disabled' or other characteristics.
[666] This is reflected in the title of this thesis and in Chapter 1.
[667] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 51)
[668] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 52) I have personally found that when I do not act in the way that some people assume disabled people do/should act, others can become discomforted, for example through being married, independent, and well educated.

participatory inclusion of disabled people in Baptist church communities. By overcoming these barriers through the fostering of friendships, disabled and non-disabled people are enabled to discern together their God-given vocations, rather than simply taking roles imposed by others. It is through particular friendships between disabled and non-disabled people, rather than simply general relationships, that the discernment of gifting and vocation can be significantly enhanced for the whole church.[669]

The second way that Fiddes's insights become relevant for the inclusion of disabled people concerns the need to find a balance between integrity to self and openness to others.[670] This is about the degree to which we are 'self' or 'other' centred and is a recurrent theme in McFadyen's exploration of personhood.[671] Fiddes agrees with McFadyen that we are formed as persons, at least in part, by our relationships with other people. This can take two forms: we can be formed by 'sedimentation', a geological metaphor used by McFadyen, or in a more dynamic 'fluvial' way, a metaphor used by Cunningham.[672] These are real-time processes within the lifetime of a disabled person.[673] I want to take the argument a stage further, and to suggest that the way we understand disability and disabled people is formed not only by actual relationships with others, but by the entire history of relationships between disabled people and non-disabled people, which has already shaped societal understandings of disability and disabled people.

Fiddes says that, unless we are aware of the tension between self and openness to others, we may either "… fail to notice the self-interest in our offers of care, which are really exploitation"[674] or, even worse, we may seek out disabled people and those who are dying so that we can displace our own fears through our attempts to care for them. This only serves to reinforce the perception of disabled people as passive, through the action of 'caring for' them rather than 'being with' them in their daily lives.

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[669] (Biggar, 2004, pp. 31-47) argues that the value of biographical life 'lies in the individual's obedient response to God's vocation … and that this theological concept of responsibility pushes the boundaries … out from the active … to embrace passive, receptive and appreciative ones too.' (Biggar, 2004, p. 47) This indicates that those with severe disabilities are included.

[670] (Fiddes, 2000, pp. 22-24)

[671] (McFadyen, 1990)

[672] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 23) referring to (Cunningham, 1998, p. 199; McFadyen, 1990, pp. 41, 72-44)

[673] (McFadyen, 1990, p. 41) argues that each person is formed by their personal experiences of relationships or communications with other people.

[674] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 23)

Fiddes asks a pertinent question: "… how shall we resolve the tension between being formed by language, by the network of communication with others in which we are born and nurtured, and being language users ourselves?"[675] His response is that this is enabled through participation in God, in such a way that we conform "… to the Christ whom we meet in and through the other."[676] I highlighted earlier the way that metaphorical language can focus either on difference, reinforcing exclusion, or on likeness, fostering inclusion. In a participatory relationship with God and with other people, understood in terms of friendship, disabled and non-disabled people are able to communicate in ways that recognise the reciprocal impact of language and the effect this has both on the self and on others.

It is really important that people develop relationships that are open to others. I believe that this is particularly important regarding relationships between disabled people and non-disabled people. Historically, there has been a forced separation between disabled and non-disabled people, especially resulting from institutionalisation. This has hindered relationships in general, and friendship in particular. Since the late twentieth century, there has been a welcome reduction in the institutionalisation of disabled people.[677] Many people with impairments are very aware of their identify as 'disabled' and its implications. I suggest that few non-disabled people would identify themselves as such yet may still primarily identify those with impairments as disabled. From my own experience as a wheelchair user who has been in mainstream education and worked in both secular and religious organisations, I am confident that it is possible to bridge this distance and form friendships with others, both disabled and non-disabled.[678] This does, however, occasionally still lead to uncertainty of my own self-identity. When I talk about the inclusion of disabled people in church communities I sometimes say: "We [the church] need to work to include them [disabled people]." The reverse is also true, as I sometimes experience being a disabled person excluded by non-

[675] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 52) It is important that the definitions of communication and language are inclusive of those who do not have the ability of spoken language and that such communication is 'undistorted/undistorting' rather than 'distorted/distorting' in the way McFadyen defines these (McFadyen, 1990).
[676] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 53)
[677] There is, however, evidence that disabled people are being re-institutionalised due to cuts in funding for them to live and work in the community (Ryan, 2019, pp. 74-104) See page 68.
[678] See Chapter 2.

disabled people, expressed as: "You [the church] need to work to include us [disabled people]."

The third issue concerns the tension between the individual and community, expressed by Fiddes as the relationship between dependence and independence.[679] This yet again raises the tension between the central focus on the individual in the Individual/Medical Model of Disability, and the focus on society in Social Models of Disability. The first assumes the dependence of disabled people on others while, in the second, the individual can become lost altogether, ending up completely independent of others.[680] Fiddes, expressing a view shared by Wesley Carr, suggests that we can and must "… distinguish between 'relationship' and 'relatedness'" where 'relationship' concerns mutual, reciprocal self-giving, which may be mature (but can also be immature where there is dependence), and 'relatedness' concerns how we relate to others through the 'personages' that we adopt.[681] Only by holding these two, relationships and relatedness, alongside each other can we find a credible sense of mutual interdependence.[682]

Fiddes, again prompted by Wesley Carr, also adds the importance of 'inter-relation', "… where the fact of relating between two or more people has a wide effect; it creates a new context of inter-relation which affects not only those directly involved but others as well."[683] If we can create whole communities in which interdependence is encouraged through friendships, this will have an automatic impact on relationships between disabled and non-disabled people. Such relationships will always be open to others and could potentially shape the broader community beyond the church.[684]

[679] (Fiddes, 2000, pp. 24-25)
[680] As previously noted, when various organisations provide concessions for disabled people it is usually phrased in the language of providing free admission for the 'carer' of a disabled person, which assumes dependence, rather than a 'companion' which suggests interdependence or independence.
[681] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 25)
[682] Reynolds analyses the way society fosters a form of independence that excludes disabled people. He argues that interdependence, between people and with God, is a helpful way of seeking a more inclusive approach (Reynolds, 2008, pp. 14, 42, 117f, 197, 217) See page 101.
[683] (Fiddes, 2000, pp. 53-54) referring to Wesley Carr (1989) *The Pastor as Theologian: The Integration of Pastoral Ministry, Theology and Discipleship*. London, SPCK.
[684] They may have an effect beyond the immediate faith community and shape the local geographical (physical locality) and network (social locality including virtual) community context of a faith community for good. This is one way in which we are 'salt and light' to our communities (Matthew 5:13-16).

The fourth and final issue concerns the tension between diversity and unity, which takes us back to the tension between 'person' and 'personage'.[685] Fiddes suggests that this becomes a source of exclusion based on real or perceived difference. We humans have a tendency to relate best to those who are most like ourselves, and to distance ourselves from those who are different.[686] Once again, language reinforces a division between people who are 'like' one another and people who are 'different', with disastrous implications for disabled people.

The denial of difference, and assumptions about normality, have been major factors in the exclusion of disabled people in both society and the church. As Fiddes notes, one consequence is that disabled people find that their disabilities are ignored. This happens, he says, when non-disabled people pretend that disabled people are "… really able-bodied".[687] In my experience as a wheelchair user, this denial of difference is often expressed as 'we're all disabled really' and is followed by trivial examples such as having long/short sight requiring glasses.[688] The effect is that real differences between us, and their significance, are ignored or denied.

After a substantial review of the issues, Fiddes goes on to write:

> … participating in the life of God means an experience of otherness … the otherness of the personal relations in God, which are united at the same moment in a communion of love, will and purpose.[689]

Potentially, then, it is through an experience of otherness *and* unity of God that we can be enabled to hold in tension the diversity of our different human embodiments. Whether disabled or non-disabled, we can become more genuinely unified by participation in the life of God than we are separated by our diversity. This potential for inclusivity is relevant not

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[685] (Fiddes, 2000, pp. 25-28)

[686] This is revealed in the formation of social cliques and exclusive groups of various forms and challenged by the breaking down of such barriers by and in Christ such that they no longer matter in the church. See Galatians 3:28, which is explored in depth by Peter Oakes in his commentary on Galatians (Oakes, 2015). The suggestion that church growth should be focused on 'homogenous groups' is argued for by Donald McGavran, the founder of the church growth movement, in *Understanding Church Growth*: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing (1970). According to this theory, disabled and non-disabled people are unlikely to participate together in a church community, because of their real and perceived differences.

[687] Paraphrasing (Fiddes, 2000, p. 26)

[688] Since the wearing of glasses usually returns sight to 'normal' but the provision of a wheelchair, say, only provides an alternative to walking, the equating of the two is inappropriate. A more helpful way to approach this is through the idea that all humans have limits, which affect us in varied ways, see (Creamer, 2009). See discussion in Chapter 5 on page 103.

[689] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 54)

only for disabled people, but also for people excluded by gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, as well as socio-political and economic status.

It has not been helpful that the term 'the disabled' has too often been used to categorise the role of disabled people in society. It suggests that disabled people are an easily identifiable and homogenous group. In reality there is significant diversity among disabled people, which means that well-meaning actions to include some can unintentionally exclude others.[690] There is a need to recognise the particularity of each person's individual embodiment such that we foster friendships that recognise the uniqueness of each person. A strong grasp of the idea of our participation in God can enable us to hold in tension the diversity among disabled people and the unifying reality of being in a shared relationship with God.

6.5.2 Pastoral Implications of 'Participation'

As we have seen, much has been written about the forms of oppression that have been experienced by disabled people. Fiddes's concept of 'participation' in God and with others provides hope that such experiences can be transformed:

> … if communion together in the body of Christ is not just a model of the Trinity, but a means of entering the relational movements of the triune God, this has the reality of participation, which is just as 'concrete' as the immediate communion within and between local churches.[691]

Fiddes looks at two examples of how the Christian faith has been linked to two images of power and authority : the 'Chi-Rho' emblem which was displayed at the head of Constantine's army and the 'Holy Crown' from twelfth century Hungary.[692] Building on these, Fiddes demonstrates how, at times, Christian thinking became dominated by symbols of power that oppress and exclude.[693] Although the church has resisted *theological* monarchianism, he suggests, it has been less successful in resisting *political* and *ecclesiastical* monarchianism.[694] Very hierarchical church structures, consequent upon symbols of oppressive power, have excluded people from the possibility of meaningful participation.[695]

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[690] For example, tactile pavements at pedestrian crossings which assist blind people are problematic for some wheelchair users.

[691] (Fiddes, 2000, pp. 88-89)

[692] (Fiddes, 2000, pp. 63-66)

[693] This form of power has been called 'royal or sovereign power' by Foucault (Goodley, 2017, pp. 131-134, 138-140; McKenny, 1997, p. 202).

[694] (Fiddes, 2000, pp. 66-67)

[695] (Fiddes, 2000, pp. 67-68) Although this is more obvious in the centralised structure of the Roman Catholic Church, versions of it can be found in non-Episcopal churches which may lead to the exclusion of women.

It might be the case that in many places the idea of the absolute power of monarchs is past but, as Fiddes puts it:

> … what persists beyond the age of absolute monarchs is the character of power itself as the desire to unify, to place oneness and universality above diversity and difference.[696]

There are other ways that the nature and use of power can be understood.[697] In a discussion about 'invention and discovery' with respect to disability and impairment, Hans Reinders reminds readers of Foucault's understanding of power:

> Power is not a repressive force … but is the fabrication of entities of discourse that produce information and knowledge of what they 'are'. Foucauldian 'power' creates its own subjects and enables them to act in certain ways, and only in doing so constrains them.[698]

This, Reinders suggests, led to the 'invention' of 'impairment' in the late eighteenth century, based on a false distinction between 'normal' and 'abnormal', as identified through medicine.[699] Reinders, with a primary interest in people with learning disabilities, also points out that, for them, Foucault's analysis can be problematic because of its assumptions about agency.[700]

Fiddes usefully highlights another factor that has helped to limit progress towards participation. He notes that people often submit to authority, even when it is oppressive. This can be explained, at least partly, by "… a conflict [within us] between the longing for security and the desire for freedom."[701] For disabled people this can be expressed by adopting the 'sick role' and remaining passive recipients of care within a church

[696] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 65) Fiddes also examines the nature of how this causes domination of others through the state, within church and concerning gender equality and how these can be challenged (Fiddes, 2000, p. 96f).
[697] The forms of power referred to by Reinders are identified as 'bio-power' by Foucault (McKenny, 1997, p. 203). This is a recurrent theme for Reynolds in his challenge to the 'cult of normalcy' through acknowledgement of our common vulnerability. (Reynolds, 2008).
[698] (Reinders, 2008, p. 75)
[699] (Reinders, 2008, p. 76)
[700] See (Reinders, 2008, pp. 62-87) for an analysis of Foucault's influence, largely negative with respect to people with learning disabilities. For people with physical disabilities Foucault's influence is positive: see (Reynolds, 2008, p. 58) who comments on the positive impact of Foucault's understanding of the abuse of power. For a brief description of Foucault and the structuring of madness see (Marks, 1999, pp. 141-143).
[701] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 70)

community.[702] There is an inescapable tension between seeking two apparently irreconcilable alternatives. On the one hand, there is the security and certainty of conforming to certain expected patterns of behaviour that constrain us and may prevent us from fulfilling a God-given vocation. On the other hand, there is the desire to be free, or be freed, to seek and fulfil our vocation. As with the tension between dependence and independence, there is no simple choice between security and freedom. Rather, there needs to be a balance, such that, from a place of security, in non-oppressive relationships such as friendships, we can seek the freedom to participate with God, with others, in and with the world.

6.6 Contemporary Covenant Relationships and Baptist Ecclesiology

I now intend to examine how Baptist covenant ecclesiologies might help us to realise the potential for participatory inclusion of disabled people.

6.6.1 Covenant

I already provided an overview of the historical context in which Baptist understandings of covenant relationships took shape. I now want to examine some key characteristics of their understanding of covenant, and how it connects with Baptist ecclesiologies. The late twentieth century saw renewed interest in the idea of 'covenant' and its implications for Baptist church life. Paul Fiddes was one of the key voices in the debates that took place during that period within and among Baptist churches, Associations, the Baptist Union and in wider Baptist and ecumenical conversations. Andy Goodliff, however, notes that despite Fiddes's influence, "… a theology of a union as covenant failed to embed itself in the language and practice of the Union."[703] Despite this, I am firmly convinced that Fiddes's understanding of God as Trinity, especially his use of 'persons *as* relation' and 'participation', enhances a Baptist covenant ecclesiology that enables the fostering of inclusive relationships.

[702] Jacobs's research method required her to talk to disabled people in church settings. Some church leaders, acting as 'gatekeepers', considered these disabled people 'too vulnerable' for Jacobs to be allowed to meet, even when those participants had already given consent (Jacobs, 2019, pp. 48-50). Jacobs explores how disabled people can resist the role placed on them by non-disabled people through resistant readings of the biblical narrative (pp. 79-85) and through challenging disablism (pp. 187-192). Deborah Marks suggests that the disability rights movement has been a form of cultural resistance against the structural barriers, attitudes and practices that disempower and exclude disabled people (Marks, 1999, pp. 80-83) Both Marks and Jacobs emphasise disabled people acting as agents of resistance.

[703] (Goodliff, 2019, p. 146)

Writing about relationships 'within' God as Trinity, Fiddes says:

> When we speak of the Trinity in narrative terms, we envisage the Father sending forth the Son in an ecstasy of love, and the Son responding to the Father in reciprocal love; this love is so intense and overflowing that God desires that other sons and daughters should share in the same relationship. The divine longing is for the movements of the dance between Father and Son to be opened up to a myriad of other partners. God is not content to be self-sufficient, and in this divine discontent we can see the work of the Spirit. … All creatures are held within the divine intention for fellowship, at the eternal moment of begetting the Son. As Karl Barth expresses it, it is as the Father makes covenant with the Son from all eternity that he also makes covenant with the man Jesus of Nazareth, and through him with all men and women.[704]

This emphasis on God's desire for us to be drawn into the dance as participants, and God's initiative in making covenant with all people, is fundamental for the way participation is expressed in covenant communities. An emphasis on God's desire for relationship with people is not unique to Fiddes's approach to God as Trinity, but his emphasis on 'persons *as* relation' offers far reaching implications for all relationships: in God, with God and with each other. All the social, economic and other barriers that exist between people are potentially broken down.[705] Barriers of this kind were identified long ago in New Testament letters to churches in Galatia and Colossae, to which we can now add barriers between disabled and non-disabled people.[706] If our relationships with other people could be modelled on our potential for relationship with God, then the non-discriminatory characteristics of God's covenant initiative could impact us all. And, as Fiddes is quick to point out, an appreciation of relationships within God as Trinity would also lead to more emphasis on mutuality. A new emphasis on mutual relationships, inspired by Fiddes's understanding of God as Trinity, has the potential to address the asymmetric relationships that have become normal between

[704] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 95) notes that 'narrative forms' for speaking of God as Trinity are found in the way the historic creeds speak of the relationships within God, and that this can be thought of in terms of a direction of movement within the relationship (Fiddes, 2000, p. 41).

[705] (Oakes, 2015, pp. 127-132) suggests that in Galatians 3:26-29 Paul is arguing for unity within diversity. (Reinders, 2013b, pp. 37-49) suggests that inclusion of others is the default position "… because it is given in creation." (p. 43). He suggests the ecological metaphor of 'weeds' to illustrate how human beings, rather than God, have decided which things/people are worthy or not.

[706] Galatians 3:28 (NRSV): "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." Colossians 3:11 (NRSV): "In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!!" (Swinton, 2004, p. 7) quoting Frances Young.

disabled and non-disabled people, and the promise of new creative relationships could open up.

Fiddes explores two dimensions of God's intentions for covenant relationships, the 'vertical' and the 'horizontal'. In some accounts, this has almost sounded like two distinct covenants.[707] Such a separation would wrongly suggest a divide between God's covenant initiative with all creation and our covenant relationships with each other. This could lead to all kinds of unhelpful scenarios, and seriously limit the way in which we understand God's desire to be in covenant with all people. If, for example, the reality on the ground is that disabled people are denied full covenant relationships with others in a church community, it is hard to separate this from the implication that God has different desires for relationships with disabled and non-disabled people.[708]

Baptists who share Fiddes's concerns are keen to emphasise the universal significance in God's desire to be in covenant relationships with all creation.[709] Fiddes argues:

> … that our covenant with God, freely given in grace, is bound up with that 'covenant' in God's own communion of life in which God freely determines to be God. If we think of the covenant in Christ like this, then it becomes even more astonishing that our 'horizontal' human dynamic of covenant-making should be taken into the 'vertical' dimension of God's covenant. We are participating not only in God's covenant with us, but in the covenant-making in God.[710]

This is a significant contribution to the development of a contemporary Baptist understanding of covenant, and for Baptist church communities. As Fiddes makes clear, we

[707] This separation has a long history indicated by a reference to Augustine's view on the lack of connection between vertical and horizontal (Gunton, 1993, p. 47 (note 16)). For example (McBeth, 1992) suggests, falsely, that confessional documents are about the vertical, our relationship with God, while covenant documents are about the horizontal, our relationship with each other. This flies in the face of the fact that in the seventeenth century they were often in one document. Roger Hayden's examination of the 1689 Particular Baptist confession indicates that the two aspects were considered to be very different relationships (Hayden, 1988, p. 413). (Jeanrond, 2010, pp. 120-127) links covenant and love, understanding one as a result of the other.
[708] (Sutcliffe-Pratt, 2017, pp. 15-24) for instance, places significance on the two dimensions despite relying on Fiddes's approach to God as Trinity and covenant. (Grenz, 1994, p. 625f) argues for a vertical and a horizontal dimension, with the former as primary. (Callam, 2014, p. 97) assumes vertical and horizontal elements to covenant and infers that the horizontal is dependent on our agreement to relate to others. Both elements are identified in (Kidd et al., 1997).
[709] See (Kidd, 1996, pp. 12-15) for a brief discussion of the importance of not overemphasising these aspects of covenant. The understanding of God's participation in creation underpins Reynolds' suggestion of God's intentional vulnerability which, he argues, suggests our vulnerability is part of being made in the image of God (Reynolds, 2008, p. 177f).
[710] (Fiddes, 2003, p. 79)

need to reach beyond a simple division between 'vertical' and 'horizontal' aspects of covenant relations.[711]

One element in the debates that took place between Baptists in the late twentieth century concerned to what degree covenant relationships are to be thought of as 'closed and exclusive' or 'open and inclusive'. Andy Goodliff, in *Renewing a Modern Denomination*,[712] shows that Paul Fiddes and Brian Haymes consistently argued for an open understanding of covenant relationships, while others, such as Roger Hayden, argued for a more restricted concept of covenant relationships linked, for example, to some kind of confessional document.[713]

Not all views of covenant relationships that stress restrictions and limits have a direct knock-on effect on the participatory inclusion of disabled people, but they can set the tone more generally for relationships with everyone who is perceived as being different. At its most extreme, the emphasis on limits leads to divisions within the wider Baptist world between groups insistent on the rightness of their own wording for confessional documents. This can have a very destructive effect on potential relationships between congregations, between different traditions, and between denominations. Restricted understanding of God's intentions for universal covenantal relationships may tend to be hostile, or at best indifferent, towards liberal social attitudes such as the inclusion of marginalised people.

Broad, open, inclusive understandings of covenant relationships, however, have the potential to enable local churches to engage with a wide range of partners: with local communities and other churches in ways that are inclusive, not only for disabled people, but for all who are marginalised by churches and by wider society. This is particularly important at the present time, when the interdependency of congregations is once again threatened by several factors. These include a renewed tendency to emphasise: the independence of the local church; diverse experiences of different traditions among those attending Baptist churches that have little or no understanding of Baptist history and ecclesiology; different and strongly held views about the role of women in Baptist churches, which continues to be

[711] (Sutcliffe-Pratt, 2017).
[712] (Goodliff, 2019)
[713] (Goodliff, 2019, pp. 7, 65-67; Hayden, 1985; Haymes, 1985)

divisive; and, in recent years, disagreements over same-sex marriage.[714] At the turn of the millennium, there was a concerted attempt to re-emphasise the importance of covenant relationships within and between Baptist churches. It was expressed by the publication of *Covenant 21*.[715] Take-up in local congregations, however, was patchy. Today, it would be templates for 'covenant services' included in *Gathering for Worship*[716] that are more widely known or used.[717] In recent years, financial constraints on Baptist church communities have meant a greater focus on working within Associations rather than as a single denominational Union.[718] A particular challenge caused by a crisis in the funding of minister's pensions has added pressure on the identity of a national Union. The way that various 'stakeholders' have found themselves in tension with one another is unlikely to be resolved without recourse to what some are calling a 'Family Solution'.[719] This might also be described as a 'Covenant Solution'. It is clear, then, that engagement with the idea of covenant is far from over.

An understanding of covenant relationships that sees them as manifestations of God's covenant relationship with the world, at local, regional, national, international and also ecumenical levels, has potential to foster inclusion and participation well-beyond the local church congregation. Although the evidence of the survey discussed in Chapter 2 has not yet been fully analysed, there was already evidence for the participatory inclusion of disabled people in some Baptist congregations. If congregations understand themselves to be in strong covenant relationships with other churches, the local Association and the wider Union of churches, then good practise concerning inclusion is more likely to be shared, and individuals are more likely to be encouraged to participate in wider church life. That was certainly my own experience during the process of testing a call to ministry. The church in which I was a member at the time had good relationships with other Baptist churches and the local Association. This assisted the provision of opportunities for me to preach and lead services beyond the local congregation, and facilitated my involvement in the local

[714] For an appeal to the covenant basis of inter-church relationships on this last issue see (Allison-Glenny et al., 2017).
[715] (Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2000)
[716] (C. J. Ellis & Blyth, 2005) provides a wide range of resources for a variety of occasions in the life of Baptist church communities, superseding or at least complementing the earlier *Patterns and Prayers (B. Green, 1991).*
[717] (Goodliff, 2019, pp. 134f, 153)
[718] These constraints have meant a significant staffing-reduction at Baptist House in Didcot, Oxfordshire, and a greater reliance on Association staff, some of whom are volunteers. This has impacted the work of the Disability, Women's and Racial Justice Groups.
[719] For a discussion of the use of familial language see (Goodliff, 2012).

Association. Although the language of covenant was not widely used at the time, there is little doubt that my experience was a practical outworking of an open understanding of covenant relationships beyond the local congregation.

6.6.2 Ecclesiology

Different perspectives on the nature of covenant relationships within and beyond church congregations are fundamental to the ecclesiology of Baptist churches. I think that this has real potential to foster inclusive relationships not found in all models of church. Fiddes writes that:

> There is … a natural association between the being of God as a *communion* of relationships, and the universal church as a communion (not a single object) which is reflected in the life of the local church.[720]

There is significant movement in Fiddes's statement: it begins with God as Trinity; it moves to the fundamental covenant relationship between God and God's world; it then progresses to God's universal covenant relationship with all people; and finally, it focuses on the covenant relationship between the members of particular congregations. Within Baptist life, this movement is expressed in mutual, interdependent relationships within a local church, between local congregations, between Associations, and within the Union. It then stretches to wider denominational and ecumenical relationships. The continuity of such relations, and the participation they represent, is critical for the participatory inclusion of disabled people, and everyone who has been marginalised by church and society.[721]

The question of appropriate ecclesiologies becomes more sharply focused still when we consider different models and metaphors of the church.[722] There have been times in their history when some Baptists have put great emphasis on who can and who cannot be a

[720] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 86)

[721] This will be developed in Chapter 7 where I argue for friendships as a similar continuum of relationships.

[722] There are some well-known biblical metaphors of the church as body, building and people: Body – 1 Cor. 12:12, 27. Temple – 1 Cor. 3:9-17, 1 Cor. 6:19, 3:19, Ephesians 2:22. People – Ephesians 2:15, 1 Pet. 2:9. Howard Snyder's *Models of Church and Mission* (Snyder, 2010) identifies a wide range of models of church and discusses their links to mission, a task also undertaken from a Baptist perspective by (Rollinson, 2005). Avery Dulles's seminal *Models of Church* (Dulles, 1988) initially identifies five (in his 1974 edition), adding a sixth (Community of Disciples) in the later edition. From a different perspective Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* (Niebuhr, 2001) identifies five forms of relationship between the church and the world. Other writers have concentrated on a single preferred model, for example Volf on the local gathered church, Zizioulas on the Orthodox churches, and Ratzinger on the Roman Catholic Church.

member of a particular congregation.[723] In recent times, there has been more emphasis on creative relationships between church members, regular attendees, and those who choose to remain on the margins. These are not trivial issues and demand careful consideration. The question is whether churches need hard doctrinal and/or social boundaries, or whether boundaries between churches and the wider world can be much more loosely defined, and consequently porous.[724]

Recently, there has been a good example of an attempt to create an expression of church that intentionally develops the idea of a faith community to include people marginalised by both church and society.[725] Daniel Sutcliff-Pratt's *Covenant and Church for Rough Sleepers*[726] also draws strongly on the work of Paul Fiddes to show how the same four pastoral concerns to which I have drawn attention are foundational for a covenantal ecclesiology.[727] These, Sutcliffe-Pratt suggests, enable the possibility of a community that is engaged in mission and seeks conformity to "… the Christ who we meet in the other."[728] This, he claims, holds a right balance between 'I' and 'Thou', and seeks to engage in an 'experience of the other', enabling both God and other people to be "… united in love, will and purpose."[729] I have used a similar argument to make the case for the inclusion of disabled people. Churches which foster inclusive relationships have the potential to transform the lives of disabled people, not only within church congregations but also in their local communities.

The three best-known biblical metaphors for the church can be understood as either exclusive or as mutually informing. It would be easy to dismiss the metaphor of the church

[723] (Dulles, 1988) notes for each model whether the members or non-members are seen as the beneficiaries of the church. For instance, seventeenth-century churches linked membership to doctrinal confessions and focused attention on members over non-members. This means there was a focus on who members were as individuals, rather than their relationships within a community of faith.
[724] Using a mathematical analogy, these boundaries might be described as being a bounded set, an open set or a centred set. The work of Snyder, Dulles and Niebuhr on models of church considers the nature of the boundary between the church community, the local community and the wider world (Dulles, 1988; Niebuhr, 2001; Snyder, 2010). Toth connects friendship with the idea of church as a 'porous gathering' (Toth, 2015, pp. 83-84).
[725] Sutcliff-Pratt uses a model of three overlapping circles to represent different covenant commitments to the church '57 West' while Rick Warren uses a model of five concentric circles (Sutcliffe-Pratt, 2017, pp. 25-26; Warren, 1995, pp. 131-134).
[726] (Sutcliffe-Pratt, 2017)
[727] (Sutcliffe-Pratt, 2017, pp. 12-13) These four concerns are the tension between role and identity; integrity to self and openness to others; dependence and independence; and diversity and unity.
[728] (Sutcliffe-Pratt, 2017, p. 13)
[729] (Sutcliffe-Pratt, 2017, p. 13) quoting (Fiddes, 2000, p. 54)

as ‘a building’ because it seems to leave no obvious place for interpersonal relationships.[730] If the church is ‘a temple’, with the emphasis on people who are each temples of the holy spirit in community being built into a community by Christ, then there is a greater emphasis on relationships.[731] The church as ‘a body’, however, suggests that strong relationships are analogous to the way muscles and sinews hold physical bodies together. Finally, the church as ‘the people of God’ looks to have much to offer, locating interpersonal relationships at the heart of the church. Fiddes suggests that these three metaphors are in fact closely related to one another:

> … we can discern a ‘leading profile’ of one person which belongs with each image. The metaphor of the body begins with the Son, as the church is identified with Christ. The image of the temple directs our attention first to the Spirit, indwelling in the church. The image of the people of God begins from a relationship to God the Father, Father now not of one nation alone but of all humankind.[732]

Fiddes suggests that each of these models has become identified with particular sociality, sociological and political aspects of church life.[733] If we also relate them to different aspects of God as Trinity, it becomes possible to associate these three aspects with key elements in our concern for the participatory inclusion of disabled people. We can then develop an ecclesiology which is open to marginalised people, drawing them into a covenant faith community.[734]

The metaphor of dance, which earlier we saw associated with an invitation from God to participate in God’s trinitarian life, can also be useful here. It can shed light on an ecclesiological understanding of relationships within and beyond the church. As previously noted, Baptists have often summed this up in the ideas of ‘walking together’ and ‘watching over one another’. If we compare our participation in God to a ‘circle dance’, there is a danger that church communities only look *inwards*, focusing entirely on maintaining their existing relationships and traditions. There will be a tendency to emphasise clear boundaries between the church and others, prejudiced towards those who are ‘like us’, and keeping

[730] See Ephesians 2:19-22, 1 Corinthians 3:19.
[731] See 1 Corinthians 3:16-7 (where ‘you’ is plural), Ephesians 2:20-22 (where church as building and temple are related), 2 Corinthians 6:16.
[732] (Fiddes, 2003, p. 70)
[733] (Fiddes, 2003, pp. 71-72) Fiddes makes a careful distinction between “… sociality… formed by the coinherence of Christ and believers…” and “sociological, pointing to the organisation of a gathered community…” (p71).
[734] (Fiddes, 2003, pp. 24-30, 31-37) discusses the connections between four key understandings of covenant and the implications for ecclesiology.

others ‘unlike us’ clearly outside. Such a tendency would mean not only disabled people, but everyone significantly ‘unlike us’ being excluded from participation. If, however, we understand our participation in God as a ‘progressive dance’, as I favoured earlier, then there is potential for churches to become communities of people that look *outwards,* towards those on the margins and beyond. The relationships and traditions of such a church will be more flexible, and can be supportive of initiatives that invite others to participate. Rather than seeing people as simply either ‘like us’ or ‘unlike us’, a third possibility is coming into view. This is a trinitarian model in which a rich diversity of people are drawn together by their participation with God, ‘being with’ one another and with God, enabling each other to be formed in the image of Christ.

6.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the Baptist context, with its roots in the seventeenth century. I have highlighted the importance of concepts of covenant in Baptist life, and I have pointed to renewed interest in the language of ‘covenant’ since the late twentieth century. I have especially drawn on Paul Fiddes’s understanding of God as Trinity, with its emphases on ‘persons *as* relation’ and ‘participation’. This has enabled me to connect the theological and pastoral implications of Fiddes’s ideas with my concerns about the participatory inclusion of disabled people in Baptist communities. I have come to the conclusion that contemporary Baptist understandings of covenant relationships and gathered church ecclesiologies generally can provide a secure framework for the fostering of relationships that enable participatory inclusion. I have championed the idea that God’s covenant with all creation is both intentional and inclusive. If this were fully embraced by more contemporary Baptist congregations it could revolutionise their ability to include many who currently find themselves at the margins.

Part 4 Response: Friendship as Way of Fostering Participatory Inclusion

Chapter 7 Friendship and Baptist Covenant Communities

7.1 Introduction

In this final stage of the pastoral cycle, I want to show that friendship, when understood in terms of intentionality, mutuality and particularity, is an appropriate way to transform the participatory inclusion of physically disabled people in Baptist church communities.

I am going to look at the nature of friendship, both historically and in contemporary writings.[735] I want to demonstrate how friendship has the potential to overcome some of the barriers I have already identified that currently restrict the participatory inclusion of physically disabled people. Some of these barriers are real where others are merely perceived, either by disabled or non-disabled people, each from their own perspective. In a conversation concerning the theological approaches surveyed in Chapter 5, I intend to show how the lenses provided by the terms intentional, mutual and particular give us a clearer view of the possible significance of friendship. It will also become clear that this fits well with both Paul Fiddes's understanding of God as Trinity and Baptist understandings of a covenant ecclesiology, as I explored in Chapter 6. I will set out a series of proposals for the way friendship can transform the participatory inclusion of disabled people in local Baptist congregations, within Baptist Associations, in the life of the Baptist Union, and in wider ecumenical and mission contexts.

7.2 The Potential for Friendship

Friendships exist within a continuum of relationships, ranging from the most intimate to the most hostile. Sally McFague refers to this as the "… sliding definition of a friend."[736] Hostile relationships, for example between opposing members of street gangs, show no signs of friendship whatsoever. These would be examples of highly distorted relationships that restrict the possibilities of personhood for the individuals involved.[737] Relationships that range from the intimacy of a long-term marriage, to the more distant casual and transitory, provide different levels of intensity and inclusion between individuals and groups, which can

[735] The nature of friendship has been debated since Aristotle. (Carmichael, 2004, pp. 7-61) provides a detailed survey of the history of the study of friendship from ancient to modern times. (Jeanrond, 2010, pp. 208-215; Summers, 2009, pp. 53-77) provide surveys of key issues. (Swinton, 2000, p. 36f) discusses the continuities and discontinuities of a Christian perspective and the historical debate.
[736] (Jeanrond, 2010, p. 205; McFague, 1982, p. 157; Summers, 2009, p. 72)
[737] (McFadyen, 1990, p. 42)

be understood in terms of friendships.[738] These are relationships that undistort the personhood of those involved.[739] For some time now, virtual friendships, through social media, have become commonplace, and now need to be included within the continuum, although they stretch beyond the scope of this thesis.[740]

There has been some debate around whether it is appropriate to use the language of friendship for relationships between God and those who are said to be made in God's image.[741] Some have felt there to be a tension between the particularity of friendship and the universality of God's love.[742] Three broad perspectives have emerged: that friendship and God's love are discrete forms of relationship; that friendship and God's love are closely related; and that friendship is a particular expression of God's universal love.[743] To make matters even more complicated, the second position has been nuanced in two ways: that God's universal love is the best context for formation of friendships to be made;[744] and that friendship is the context within which we best learn about the universality of God's love.[745] For Christians, this sometimes gets raised as a question about whether there is any fundamental difference in the experience of friendship for Christians as distinct from non-Christians.

My own view is that it is impossible to make a fundamental distinction between Christian and non-Christian experiences of friendship. It would quickly lead to some absurd implications. What, for example, about people who transition between faith and non-faith? It would make a nonsense of any claim to friendship having a significant role in fostering relationships between churches and their local communities. The fundamental relationship that we label friendship is the same for everyone, irrespective of faith. While the faith of one

[738] (Spencer & Pahl, 2006) discussed by (Summers, 2009, p. 72)
[739] (McFadyen, 1990, p. 45)
[740] (Fröding & Peterson, 2012; Stendal, 2012) discuss the impact of virtual relationships for disabled people. (Summers, 2009, pp. 31-35) comments on the range of relationships which include virtual ones.(IIECI, 2019) papers from a recent conference reflect on this overlap. The role of virtual friendships in the light of the 2020 Covid-19 shutdown of church buildings is worth investigating in detail, see suggestions for further research in Chapter 8.
[741] (McFague, 1987, pp. 160-162) briefly outlines this debate.
[742] See (Jeanrond, 2010, pp. 16-17, 27-18, 113-120; Wadell, 1989, pp. x, 89) for detailed discussion of this.
[743] For detailed discussions of each of these positions see (Meilaender, 1981, pp. 6-35; Summers, 2009, pp. 125-150; Wadell, 1989, pp. 70-119)
[744] (Meilaender, 1981, pp. 22-32; Swinton, 2000, pp. 36-52; Wadell, 1989, pp. 70-73)
[745] (Meilaender, 1981, pp. 8-22) identifies the source of this in the thinking of Plato and Augustine.

or both parties in a friendship might enhances some aspects of a friendship, such as openness to others for example, this is by no means guaranteed.[746]

There are three basic themes that have emerged in writings about the nature of friendship.[747] There is generally agreement that friendships are good and beneficial for those involved, often by placing the good of the other before self. It has been recognised as important, however, that friendships should be reciprocal and mutual, with both self and other contributing to and receiving from the friendship. There has been discussion about the relative merits of friendships between just two people and friendships that are more inclusive. Although friendships have often been thought of as being essentially private, they are able to be effective in the public realm.[748] Friendships may differ if they are based on intrinsic or extrinsic factors. Friendships based on intrinsic factors, such as mutual attraction or liking, tend to require a level of similarity. Friendships grounded extrinsically in the acknowledgement of God's universal love, however, have the potential to enable relationships to form between people who have significant differences.

I am in no doubt that friendship recognised as an expression of God's universal love is the best way to nurture relationships between disabled and non-disabled people in the context of Baptist communities.[749] My hope would be that Baptist communities can play a part in helping people move from highly distorted asymmetric relationships to less distorted mutual relationships.[750] This should in turn enable people to move away from impersonal, so-called 'I-It' relationships towards more inclusive 'I-Thou' relationships.[751]

Intrinsic friendships, those between two or more who are drawn together on the basis of likeness, can become vulnerable if one of those involved becomes disabled, perhaps by illness or accident. Likeness is immediately diminished. Intrinsic friendships often have to form against pressures arising from a number of different sources. Factors such as gender,

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[746] (Swinton, 2000, p. 39f) argues that *radical* friendship taking its shape from Jesus's relationships emphasises certain characteristics which are less apparent in friendships outside of a faith community.
[747] (de Graaff, 2014, pp. 11-16; Summers, 2009, pp. 70-73; Wadell, 1989, pp. 97-104; 2002, pp. 39-66)
[748] See (de Graaff, 2014) where the friendship between Bishop Bell and Dietrich Bonhoeffer is used as an example of what may be achieved in the public realm through the particularity of friendship. (Meilaender, 1981, pp. 68-85) discusses friendship in civic life.
[749] There are parallels with McLachlan's use of the universal focused in the particular regarding the nature of salvation (McLachlan, 2018, p. 31f).
[750] See Chapter 4 for a discussion of how the move from Individual/Medical to Social Models of disability assists this transformation, and Chapter 5 for a discussion of how theological approaches have done this.
[751] (Buber, 1959)

sexuality, race/ethnicity, social class, educational background, and different faith-commitments may inhibit the formation of intrinsic friendships, despite there being other factors, such as common interests and hobbies, which are typical characteristics of likeness.

We have previously seen that there can be little doubt that disability is one of the factors that can inhibit the formation of friendships, especially between disabled and non-disabled people. The presence of a disability can so exaggerate the sense of unlikeness that it can inhibit potential friendships, despite other factors, such as faith, that might appear sufficient to encourage their formation. There is an issue here about the difference between real and perceived elements of unlikeness. Some perceived differences between disabled and non-disabled people may partly be explained by the concept of a 'focusing illusion'.[752] This can influence the way some non-disabled people perceive disabled people, for example, as having a lower quality of life.[753] This is despite the fact that many disabled people self-report a very similar quality of life to non-disabled people.[754] Addressing the impact of a focusing illusion on judgements about quality of life (QOL), Amundson writes: "The focusing illusion is far more likely to produce erroneous judgments in people indirectly estimating QOL than in people reporting their own current QOL."[755] Often, when non-disabled people first meet people with an obvious and significant difference, such as my use of a wheelchair, their attention is immediately focused on that difference. Their judgements about the disabled person, such as QOL, ability, intelligence, and gifting are affected by their prior assumptions about that kind of difference, and the effect can be positive or negative.[756] As noted elsewhere, when I first meet non-disabled people, for example, they sometimes leap to such assumptions as that I do not drive, do not work, and am uneducated. Such negative assumptions certainly inhibit the potential for friendship, unless ways are found for them to be deliberately overcome. One important way of doing this is by education, enabling non-disabled people to properly understand disabled people and their experience of life. An

[752] (Amundson, 2010, p. 381f) On page 59 I explained the impact the 'focusing illusion' can have on disabled people.
[753] According to Garland-Thomson, an extreme version of this assumption underpins Peter Singer's argument for the abortion and infanticide of disabled babies (Garland-Thomson, 2015, p. 305; Singer & Kuhse, 1985).
[754] (Amundson, 2010, p. 375)
[755] (Amundson, 2010, p. 384)
[756] If non-disabled people have no previous relationship with disabled people, the effect of the 'focusing illusion' is to reinforce negative assumptions and stereotypes and apply them to the disabled persons they are meeting, who they tend to see only through the lens of the obvious differences between them. This also relates to the issues of low expectations of disabled people that are expressed by some non-disabled people.

informal way of achieving this would be through the intentional formation of friendship.[757] Research indicates that non-disabled people are more likely to estimate a low QOL for a disabled person they hear about but do not actually know, than they are for a specific disabled person that they have already come to know.[758] Challenging these misconceptions of life as a disabled person can greatly assist those non-disabled who become disabled through accident or illness. It also enables the inclusion of people who have recently experienced significant physical disabilities, who feel that life as a disabled person is no longer worth living and seek to end their own lives. Friendship can itself be an educational tool, enabling disabled and non-disabled people to achieve greater mutual understanding. Focusing illusions might also explain why I find myself mistaken for other wheelchair users. I sometimes have strangers approach me, convinced they know me, even using a name, and it can be hard to convince them that I do not know them. It only takes a non-disabled person to know one male wheelchair user, and the wheelchair becomes the overriding distinguishing feature. This effect can be strong enough to create the illusion that *any* male wheelchair user is the *one* wheelchair user they know.

There are parallels between the shift from an Individual/Medical Model of Disability to Social Models of Disability and the discovery of friendship.[759] When people form friendships with others, the focus of attention moves from the self, often in isolation, to the other, and the importance of the relationship. This resonates with a more general shift from 'centred-self', a concept that has held considerable influence throughout the period we think of as modernity, towards the concept of a 'de-centred self', which has become more prevalent in late-modernity.[760]A core feature of the de-centred self is radical openness to the other, welcoming meaningful relationships that embrace difference rather than homogeneity.[761] There are, however, risks in de-centring, the most significant of which is extreme

[757] (R. N. Turner, Hewstone, Voci, Paolini, & Christ, 2007) show that 'cross group friendships' (groups defined by nationality, race, culture, religion or social class) reduce prejudice. This effect is also found among group members who know someone in the group who has cross group friendships. Miroslav Volf has explored the role of friendship in the potential restoration of relationships within former Yugoslavia at length (Volf, 1996). (Asbjørnslett et al., 2012) looked at the nature and quality of friendships between disabled and non-disabled children which fostered inclusivity. See also (Louari & Paparousi, 2009; Østvik, Ytterhus, & Balandin, 2017). (L. Cameron & Rutland, 2006) examine how intentional friendships between disabled and non-disabled children may reduce prejudice. Other studies of friendship and disability include (Dietrich, 2005; Meyer & Ostrosky, 2014, 2016; Morrison & Burgman, 2009).
[758] (Amundson, 2010, pp. 385-386)
[759] See Chapter 4.
[760] (Summers, 2009, pp. 112-116)
[761] (Summers, 2009, pp. 116-117)

individualism of the kind that denies interrelatedness. These can be mitigated within a Christian context, if it is also understood that the shift away from a self-centredness can simultaneously be a shift towards a Christ-centred self.[762] This is a very different form of 'connected-self', in which the self is understood in terms of being profoundly related and in real dialogue with another. As Summers says "… relationship with the other is an integral part of who the self is."[763]

In the light of this, I suggest that there are good reasons to foster intentional, mutual and particular friendships, seen as an expression of God's universal love.

7.3 Metaphorical Friendship

Sally McFague makes a great deal of the metaphor 'God as friend', and I now want to relate this specifically to the relationship between disabled people and God, and between disabled and non-disabled people.[764] In the earlier discussion I drew on McFague's book *Metaphorical Theology*.[765] In her book *Models of God,*[766] the metaphor 'God as friend' is developed as part of a 'trinity' of metaphors appropriate to God. The other two are God as mother/parent and God as lover. McFague uses these as alternatives to the traditional trinity of metaphors, Father, Son and Spirit.[767] This is set within an encompassing metaphor of 'the world as God's body', which she uses to challenge the dominance of the traditional monarchical models of God.[768]

McFague sets out to make a case for the significance of friendship. The first challenge is to define friendship and explore how it relates to the love of God. She writes, "… friendship appears strangely unnecessary, yet this very lack is its strength, for it is of all human relationships the most free … of the bounds of duty, function or office."[769] The freedom of friendship, which McFague identifies as the basis of friendship, is particularly significant for

[762] (Gaventa, 2012) connects the New Testament understanding of the significance of friendship with the inclusion of disabled people.
[763] (Summers, 2009, pp. 113-114)
[764] See Chapter 3, page 60.
[765] (McFague, 1982)
[766] (McFague, 1987) McFague notes the problematic issues of friendship in Christian circles (p. 160f): tension of philia and agape (pp. 205-209, (notes 216, 218, 225, 241)); issues of Aristotle's understanding of friendship; friendship being hard to define; the tension with Christian love (p. 205).
[767] (McFague, 1987, pp. 91-95)
[768] (McFague, 1987, pp. 91-95) In her discussion of these metaphors she identifies them with *agape*, *eros*, and *philia* respectively (McFague, 1982, pp. 97f, 125f, 157f).
[769] (McFague, 1987, p. 159)

the inclusion of disabled people. Many of the relationships experienced by disabled people are indeed bound up with issues of duty, function or office. This arises most commonly because of assumptions about reliance on doctors, nurses and care staff, which are magnified in the Individual/Medical Model of Disability. By way of contrast, free friendships can have a strong element of intentionality. This results in bonds being developed, and McFague suggests that this can be "… a bond of trust … a bond of commitment, each to the other."[770] This commitment is an example of friendship based on common interest, activity or vision, and has the potential to lead towards what I have been calling covenant relationships.[771] McFague is clear that the "… importance of a common vision in divine-human relationship cannot be overstated, for it frees friendship from the self-absorbed individualism of its classical roots."[772] This common vision, being side by side, enables friendships to be inclusive of others and outward focused, rather than exclusive and insular. While I agree with McFague that a commitment to a common vision or cause can draw people into a circle, standing side by side and joining hands, there is always a risk that circles still manage to exclude as well as include. This was the issue when we considered the image of a progressive dance in the previous chapter. It provides an open, outward facing and inclusive possibility for inclusion embodied in friendship. The inclusivity of friendship is further strengthened as a development of McFague's argument that,

> … given our basic description of friendship as a bonding by free choice of two [or more] people in a reciprocal relationship, equality and gender do not enter … one can, at least theoretically, be friends with anyone across the barriers of gender, race, class, nationality, age, creed [and disability].[773]

Connections can also be made between McFague's metaphor of God as friend and aspects of covenant relationships of the kind I discussed in chapter 6.[774] McFague would have no time for the tendency to separate covenant relationships into vertical and horizontal aspects. She speaks of:

> … a meaningful contemporary understanding of God's transcendence [as] not the God "above" but "alongside" – a horizontal relationship rather than a vertical

[770] (McFague, 1987, p. 162)
[771] (McFague, 1987, p. 163) The importance of commitment to others was identified in Chapter 5 and is developed below.
[772] (McFague, 1987, p. 163)
[773] (McFague, 1987, p. 164)
[774] See page 150.

> relationship. The most appropriate image for such a horizontal relationship is God as companion, one who travels with us and shares our experience.[775]

McFague's discussion of God's saving activity as friend has much in common with Fiddes's emphasis on participation in God. McFague's way of putting it is that understanding God as friend challenges any assumption that salvation is an objective action of God 'doing for' sinful humanity in order to restore a broken relationship.[776] McFague suggests that: "… the traditional model of God's saving activity contributes to a view of human life as infantile, individualistic, and isolated …".[777] Rather, the concept of God as friend emphasises our shared collaboration in the work of salvation, a much broader concept than more individualistic approaches.[778] McFague says that "… a friendship model [of salvation] emphasizes sacrifice, support and solidarity *with* others and the world."[779] I believe that McFague's concept of God as friend is helpful when arguing the case for seeking to foster friendships between disabled and non-disabled people that prioritise 'being with' before 'being for'. Like Fiddes, I think that participation in God and intercession as persuasion mean that such matters involve *both* God and us. Following Wells, there has to be some element of Christ 'working for' us but that this is underpinned by Christ 'being with' us.[780]

7.4 Emerging Themes and The Nature of Friendship

Through the various stages of this pastoral cycle, three themes have begun to emerge: intentionality; mutuality; and particularity.[781] To understand how these themes can help us to overcome some of the barriers to friendship, I shall now consider each one in turn.

7.4.1 Intentionality and Friendship

The intentionality of a friendship is related to how, and with whom, a relationship is initiated. Within church communities the primary relationship is the covenant relationship between God and people in the community. This relationship is intentional in the sense that it is ultimately initiated by God. Following Hans Reinders, I suggest that this is best

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[775] (McFague, 1982, pp. 183-184) referring to the work of Ruth Page in "Human Liberation and Divine Transcendence," *Theology 85* (1982): 184-190.
[776] (McFague, 1982, pp. 184-188)
[777] (McFague, 1982, p. 185)
[778] McFague sees salvation as much more than 'God rescuing individuals'. For her salvation is "God with us – on our side – as we suffer through and work towards overcoming these evils and the perversity of our hearts from which they come." (McFague, 1982, p. 186)
[779] (McFague, 1982, p. 186) Italics original.
[780] (Wells, 2015, p. 23f)
[781] See the conclusions to parts 1, 2, and 3 above.

understood in terms of God's open offer of friendship.[782] Such friendship is extrinsic, originating with God rather than with individual people. Reinders usefully notes that this is one of the key points that David Pailin makes in his discussion about the worth of disabled people.[783] Relationship with others in a church community arises out of an underpinning covenant friendship with God. They are, necessarily, intentionally inclusive.

Once formed, intentional friendships between disabled and non-disabled people continue to express their intentionality in attitudes and actions. A desire to build strong friendships will inevitably motivate people to use language that is inclusive. In order to maintain a friendship, it will be natural to avoid using offensive terms when referring to disabled people, or using language based on assumptions such as asking everyone to stand to sing or expecting everyone to be able to see projected words or images.[784] When we see people as our friends, we will be intentionally working towards mutual relationships rather than assuming that others will fit into particular socially constructed categories. We would not, for example, expect friends to classify one another using categories like disabled and non-disabled. Nor would we expect to see non-disabled people defining their disabled friends by their medical conditions.[785] Friendships between disabled and non-disabled people can provide the motivation to intentionally reject such approaches and adopt more appropriate understandings of disability. The intentional adoption of a Social Model of Disability can provide a significant step towards enabling a better understanding of attitudes and actions that exclude disabled people, enabling attitudes to be challenged and changed. Intentional friendships can also provide motivation to question the various kinds of theological understandings of disability that tend towards exclusion, such as when an explicit link is made between disability and sin.

None of my friends, I am glad to report, refer to me as handicapped or crippled, but some strangers do describe me using such terms. Similarly, friends do not see me in terms of my medical condition or my use of a wheelchair, whereas strangers often focus on it. While friends might say 'Martin, who uses a wheelchair', strangers sometimes describe me as 'The

[782] (Reinders, 2008, pp. 287-292)
[783] (Reinders, 2008, pp. 210-212) and discussion of Pailin in Chapter 5.
[784] See page 56. (Jacobs, 2019, p. 115f) discusses the profound impact that assumptions about standing/sitting can have.
[785] See Chapter 4.

Wheelchair User.'[786] Friends see me in terms of a relationship, with themselves, others and God, and this corresponds, as it should, with the way I see myself.[787]

Within Baptist communities, intentional relationships have been, and continue to be, a significant factor. Most Baptists would say that not only does God intentionally include us and all creation in a covenant relationship, but that we are invited to make an intentional response to God.[788] This shows itself among Baptists in their emphasis on personal faith, marked by believers' baptism on a declaration of faith. The local church is understood to be a group of believers intentionally called and gathered by God in a particular place. The Baptist commitment to the church as local is often expressed through 'formal' membership.[789] This too is an intentional commitment, and is an explicit symbol of covenant relationships between all members of a congregation. I think that intentional covenant relationships and an intentional effort to work at the formation of friendships is an appropriate way to live out what it means to be a Baptist church community.[790] The language of 'walking together' and 'watching over one another', to which I have already drawn attention, not only describes an historical understanding of Baptist covenant relationships, but also reflects appropriate attitudes towards those with whom we are friends.

In John 15, Jesus intentionally declared that he considered his disciples to be friends. In using these words, he transforms their relationship from master/slave or teacher/pupil to that of friends.[791] In all four Gospels there are accounts that suggest his consistent intention to foster friendships with outsiders, the so-called sinners. Jesus is represented as someone who demonstrated how friendships can even cross the hard boundaries created by purity laws.[792] The community that originated with the life and teaching of Jesus was based on the primacy of relationships. Like the contemporary disciples of Jesus, contemporary Baptists also see themselves as intentional friends of God. That friendship is best expressed through fostering

[786] Deliberate capitals to indicate how the term 'The Wheelchair User' is used instead of my name.
[787] My friends are probably more likely to describe me by characteristics such as my glasses or receding hair.
[788] See Chapter 6.
[789] (Jackson, 2009) addresses the move from formal membership to a broader sense of belonging, expressed in covenant and relational terms. His research discerned that membership discourses take two forms, formal (Jackson, pp. 93-125) and relational (Jackson, pp. 126-143).
[790] Friendships are intentional, whereas familial language (brothers and sisters) as commonly used does not have such a focus, since there is no element of choice about membership of a family.
[791] See (Hauerwas, 1990, pp. 43-44; Summers, 2009, pp. 9-24)
[792] (Summers, 2009, pp. 16-17)

intentional friendships with those whom society and, all too often, the church, has tended to exclude.

7.4.2 Mutuality and Friendship

The mutuality of friendship concerns historical imbalances in the relationships between disabled and non-disabled people. Until the late twentieth century, under the dominant Individual/Medical Model of Disability, disabled people typically experienced relationships which were asymmetric. This was particularly true of the relationship between disabled people and people working in the medical and allied fields, such as physiotherapy and occupational therapy.[793] The power lay almost entirely with the professionals rather than with the patients in general and disabled people in particular. This approach to disability and disabled people influenced the wider society, and disabled people were seen as being unable to contribute and primarily in need of care and support by non-disabled people. Within churches, disabled people were frequently seen as passive members of congregations, and only the non-disabled members were fully active. Asymmetrical relationships are a consequence of assumptions made by non-disabled people 'working for' disabled people. These assumptions and attitudes can be challenged when the mutuality of friendship is taken seriously, shifting the relationships towards a more equal basis. This would be a shift from 'doing for' to 'being with', of the kind commended by Sam Wells.[794] Intentional friendships almost inevitably recognise that relationships are bi-directional, in every respect. For instance, the use of language such as 'the disabled' would be replaced by 'disabled people'. The mutual nature of friendships shifts the relationship away from a non-mutual relationship towards equality, reflected in the approach implicit in various forms of the Social Models of Disability.

Sadly, however, the Minority Group Model of Disability still dominates disability studies and disability theologies, especially in the USA. The model actually necessitates maintaining two distinct groups, and the exercise of power by the majority over the minority. The Minority Group Model of Disability can minimally foster friendships within the minority group itself, among disabled people, but that is far from adequate. Disability is essentially defined by a lack of mutuality between the majority and minority groups. This seriously inhibits the

[793] There are times when asymmetric relationships are still appropriate. The doctor/patient relationship is necessarily asymmetric, although often more dialogical than in the past.
[794] (Wells, 2015) as discussed in Chapter 6. It also shifts the relationship from 'I-It' to 'I-Thou'.

formation of inter-group friendships. For the goal of equal rights to be achieved, the minority and majority groups need to meet and merge. The irony is that persistence in oppressive socially constructed ideas about disability are actually fuelled by the lack of mutuality and division into majority and minority groups. Friendships between disabled and non-disabled people are most likely to succeed only after the importance of mutuality has been recognised.

There is a danger that Tom Shakespeare's 'critical realist'[795] approach in the UK is likely to remain an essentially academic approach to disability. It is true that the issues are complex, there being multiple factors shaping the experience of disabled people requiring complex analysis. Fostering mutual friendships can provide a more practical way of bringing the complex web of factors that shape the everyday experience of disabled people to a wider audience. This will only be possible when these issues become the subject of dialogue between disabled and non-disabled people.

It is within church communities that these theological issues become highly significant. Mutuality, like intentionality, is key to covenant relationships, with God and particularly with one another in a local congregation. Mutuality is what is happening when we 'walk together' and 'watch over one another'. This suggests that it is appropriate to use the language of mutual friendships when we are talking about relationships within local church congregations. There are two aspects of Baptist church life where this becomes particularly important: in the celebration of communion, and in the way that Baptists use church meetings to discern 'the mind of Christ'. Steve Summers, in his book *Friendship: Exploring its Implications for the Church in Postmodernity*,[796] suggests that communion can helpfully be understood as a meal, with friends of Jesus gathered around the table.[797] This use of the word 'friend' is particularly significant and is developed below.

[795] (Shakespeare, 2013, pp. 72-91) and see page 78.
[796] (Summers, 2009)
[797] (Summers, 2009, pp. 164-172) Summers suggests that friendship among Christians is 'trans-signified' by the presence of faith, that it is fundamentally the same as 'secular' friendship but with a new significance. Within faith communities we are friends of God, friends with Christ and friends with one another. Writing within an Anglican context, he has borrowed the term from an understanding of communion, in which the bread and wine are not understood to change, but what they signify changes because of the context in which they are shared and consumed. I suggest that friendship may be trans-signified by the presence of faith. This gives the relationship a deeper significance without fundamentally altering the relationship into something different.

Fiddes makes the point that hierarchical understandings of church structures "… ignore the biblical witness to the God who calls human beings into a partnership of friends, and who shares human tension and pain in order to bring us into the full growth of personhood."[798] I would add that it is also appropriate to think of church meetings as friends of God and one another gathering together to discern God's call on their life as a community. It is already there in the Baptist Declaration of Principle, which emphasises equality before God, and participation in decision making.[799] This does not mean that it is necessary for all members to be friends with each other in a sentimental sense, rather that our relationships with other members would be marked by the same kind of mutuality that makes personal friendships possible. Being friendly towards one another is a broad term. When Sally McFague uses it, she includes, "… acquaintances, companions, partners, colleagues, co-workers and associates of many sorts. We exist in a wide variety of positive connections with others, a fact that the model of friendship expresses and elaborates."[800]

The significance of mutuality is fundamental to Jesus's offer of friendship to his disciples in John 15, and his many offers of friendship to outsiders.[801] This clearly contrasts with the asymmetric relationships that other disciples might have expected from their rabbis, and a more typical absence of mutuality in attitudes towards outsiders. Mutual friendships have potential not only to enrich relationships with those inside church communities, but also to transform relationships especially with those who have previously been seen as outsiders.

7.4.3 Particularity and Friendship

Particularity, in the context of friendships, concerns the overcoming of distance that can come about between disabled and non-disabled people, if they see each other as members of two distinct homogenous groups who are different and radically unlike each other.

The Individual/Medical Model of Disability simply located this problem with individual disabled people. This merely reinforced the *status quo*, limiting relationships between disabled and non-disabled people to those of professional and client, or, more generally, non-disabled people and 'the disabled'. Social Models of Disability shift the focus away from

[798] (Fiddes, 2003, p. 96) When discussing baptism, Fiddes suggests a distinction between family/members and those who are 'friends of the household'. (Fiddes, 2003, p. 133) In light of the church being a 'partnership of friends' this might seem contradictory.
[799] (Kidd, 1996)
[800] (McFague, 1987, p. 166)
[801] (Summers, 2009, pp. 9-24)

individuals and address issues of attitudes and actions within non-disabled society, where the real problem is located. Not enough attention has been paid, however, to relationships between 'particular' non-disabled and 'particular' physically disabled people.[802] Such relationships would take into account the specific context of all the individuals involved. There is a risk of losing a proper emphasis on the importance of community, but that is not an automatic consequence, as emphasised by Jacobs.[803]

The particularity of friendships also challenges the use of inappropriate language. It challenges, for example, the assumption that disabled people are a homogenous group.[804] While there is debate about just how individual-specific the language used to refer to disabled people should be, the language used needs to be appropriate and relevant to the particular context. The two terms in common use at the present time are: 'physically disabled people' and 'people with learning disabilities'. This terminology completely fails to reflect the considerable overlap between these two categories and the diversity within each. I want to emphasise that friendships are between 'particular' people, one of whom might have a specific impairment. Language that helpfully identifies particular individuals does not necessarily need to reference disability or an impairment at all. It can simply refer to the same kind of characteristics that are used when referring to non-disabled people: such as height, hair/eye colour, and so on. My experience of the difference between being among friends or strangers is that the latter will often use language referencing my disability, while the former rarely find that either necessary or desirable.

In theologies of disability, an emphasis on particularity moves attention away from generalisations about disabled people and focuses attention on specific people in their contexts and relationships. For instance, instead of referring to someone as 'the disabled person', particular friendships encourage the use of personal names, without any reference to the existence or lack of disability.[805]

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[802] (Shakespeare, 2006, p. 167f; 2013, p. 188f) The lack of attention to the role of friendships among disabled people, and with non-disabled people, that Shakespeare identifies in the first edition of his book is echoed in the second edition which was published a decade later.

[803] (Jacobs, 2019, p. 22f) discusses the importance of community. She argues that the social location of disabled people, however, is important. (Jacobs, 2019, pp. 76, 219-243, 254-215)

[804] (McLachlan, 2018, pp. 37-39) challenges this assumption of homogeneity through a discussion of the difficulty of attempting any classification or taxonomy of disability.

[805] As Brock and Hauerwas suggest happens naturally when referring to a member of one's family (Brock & Hauerwas, 2017b, p. 201).

In Baptist church communities, there is every reason to think of the particularity of friendships as being very much connected with the ways that Baptists understand covenant relationships and a local church ecclesiology. The local congregation is a gathering of particular believers in a particular place, and is a particular expression of the covenant that God has with all creation. The particularity of friendships, then, clearly has direct relevance. While many non-disabled people might be willing to consider a friendship with disabled people, at least in general terms, the relationship becomes transformational when someone is willing to become a particular friend with a particular disabled person.

Even in Jesus's offer of friendship with his disciples in John 15, his offer was person-specific.[806] While offering friendship to all the disciples, we find accounts of Jesus's particular relationships with some disciples as distinct from others.[807] I suggest that the language of friendship reflects the degrees of intimacy between diverse believers, which is in contrast to the assumption of equality with others that familial language of being brothers and sisters may imply.[808]

7.4.4 Friendship as Intentional, Mutual and Particular

While it has been useful to consider these three perspectives separately, it should have become evident that they are, in fact, closely related.[809] The reality is that many non-disabled people do still perceive disabled people as largely passive. It would be a mistake, then, to think that intentional friendships can only be initiated by non-disabled people. Intentionality itself needs to be mutual. Both parties in a friendship can play a part in initiating them and helping them to develop. Likewise, particularity does not stand alone. Friendships between particular people are important, and they need to be held alongside wider relationships with the community. It is vital to remember that intentionality, mutuality and particularity are three facets of a single reality, and all three are essential for the formation of quality friendships. The recognition of the mutual nature of our friendships guards against particularity leading to non-mutual relationships with the wider community.

[806] (Summers, 2009, pp. 9-24)
[807] John 19:26; 21:7 with reference to the disciple John.
[808] (Goodliff, 2012) discusses Baptist understandings and use of familial language. There is also an advantage to the use of friendship language in contrast to the language of 'family and friends.' Understanding the church as a network of friendships does not imply any distinction/boundary between those who are members, or 'family', and those on the fringes of church communities, sometimes referred to as 'friends'.
[809] For example (Toth, 2015) argues for the particularity and mutuality of friendship.

7.5 Friendship and Disability Theologies

I now want to revisit theologies of disability to see how they can be enriched by a dialogue with the idea of friendship. I begin with general observations, and then move to engage with a number of specific issues that friendship can highlight.

There is an issue around friendship as soon as we consider the relationship between disabled people and those who write about disability. Authors range from interested non-disabled people right through to disabled people who are themselves active within the disability rights movement. David Pailin is an example of an interested non-disabled person writing about disability. This could be described as 'working/being for' disabled people. Eiesland is an example of a disabled person engaged with both the disability rights movement and the theology of disability. Her approach could be described as 'working with' disabled people, grounded in her own experience of 'being with' other disabled people. The authors surveyed in Chapter 5 can be located along a spectrum of positions, their overall intention normally being to move further towards 'being with' disabled people.[810] While their intention to foster greater inclusion is clear, the extent to which these approaches emphasise mutuality and particularity inevitably varies. The development of intentional, mutual and particular friendships between disabled and non-disabled people working within the field of disability theology increases the potential for greater understanding of each other's perspectives and experiences. This can then lead to further enrichment of work done to address the exclusion of disabled people from churches and wider society.

One of the broad criticisms brought to the disability studies foundation is its over-emphasis on access to physical and social space, which is only one part of a full commitment to the inclusion of disabled people.[811] One way to foster wider commitment could be through the intentional development of friendships, establishing mutual commitments between particular disabled and non-disabled people. Such friendships could provide the motivation needed to promote the participatory inclusion of disabled and non-disabled people through a greater emphasis on 'being with' and 'working with' one another. While it will remain important to address access to social space, it is also important to ensure that such access to physical space actually enables disabled and non-disabled people to meet and worship

[810] (Wells, 2015, pp. 20-31)
[811] (Reinders, 2008, p. 161) See page 110.

together. Drawing on my experience as a disabled minister, I suggest that the friendships I and other disabled people have forged have enabled non-disabled people to gain much greater insight into the experiences of disabled people. This in turn provides the motivation to seek new ways of improving the levels of participation of disabled people.

Among the theological approaches to disability that I have considered in this thesis, the one that least directly engages with friendship is that of David Pailin.[812] While it was an encounter with baby Alex, who had significant disabilities, that triggered his work, the concept of friendship is largely absent in his account. There are aspects, addressed below, which may be conducive to the emergence of friendship as a result of his approach. Eiesland's and Lewis's approaches are both much more open to the importance of friendship, but their continuing reliance on the Minority Group Model is seriously limiting.[813] Reynolds focusses on the 'cult of normalcy', which he defines as "… a set up rituals trained upon demarcating and policing the borders of a 'normal' way of being."[814] This creates a barrier which intentional friendships are well placed to overcome.[815] Once the normal/abnormal dichotomy has been removed, friendships between disabled and non-disabled people are much more likely to arise. Black's work on hermeneutics is also useful when it comes to friendship because it acknowledges interdependency. Likewise, Block's focus on hospitality has an obvious role, and Creamer's focus on limits, common to all people and not just disabled people, both suggest a role for friendship.[816]

7.5.1 Intentionality

Intentionality is significant for theological approaches to friendship, not least in the intentional commitment of the writers to explore ways to foster the inclusion of disabled people in church communities. Although Pailin's critics, such as Reinders, do not consider his work to have made significant impact, there is no doubting his intention to change the experience of severely disabled people.[817] He has contributed to a shift of focus from seeing disabled people in isolation towards a greater understanding of all people as made in the image of God. He has also shown the importance of extrinsic factors, such as agency, as well

[812] (Pailin, 1992)
[813] (Eiesland, 1994; Lewis, 2007)
[814] (Reynolds, 2008, p. 60)
[815] (Reynolds, 2008, pp. 59-63)
[816] (Black, 1996; Block, 2002; Creamer, 2009)
[817] (Reinders, 2008, pp. 206-216)

as intrinsic factors needed for change is to come about.[818] Eiesland's approach, while clearly strengthened by friendships between disabled people, inevitably suffers from its reliance on the Minority Group Model.[819] She is right, however, that intentional friendships between disabled and non-disabled people may be fostered through a common interest in civil rights. Through such friendships, non-disabled people can then use their own wider networks to enable other non-disabled people to gain a deeper insight into disability. Such friendships mean that disabled people are then able to contribute to, and gain from, friendships with those whose interests are not yet focused on civil rights. I have suggested that there are parallels here with the way that inclusion comes about in the Deaf community.[820] For inclusion of the Deaf community, there needs to be a strong motivation for non-Deaf people to learn British Sign Language (BSL), and to learn about Deaf community culture. This requires time and expense, and almost certainly necessitates the formation of intentional friendships between Deaf and non-Deaf people.

One of the challenges that Kathy Black's approach brings to the place of friendship concerns the interpretation and preaching of scripture. A general lack of awareness of the dominance and impact of non-disabled perspectives on writers and readers of scripture is problematic. Black calls this the 'traditional homiletic'.[821] While non-disabled readers of scripture do not necessarily notice the impact this has, many disabled readers may also be unaware of the issues. Non-disabled interpretations of scripture have become so much the 'normal' way that preachers prepare sermons that many disabled people are also normalised into this perspective. Reading scripture through the lens of disability and from the viewpoint of disabled people requires an intentional act. Black refers to this as the 'healing homiletic'.[822] Although there has been some excellent work that begins to raise these issues within academic literature, such as *Disability in the Christian Tradition*[823] and *The Bible and Disability*,[824] I have seen little evidence of this perspective being highlighted in more widely

[818] (Pailin, 1992, pp. 38-65; Reinders, 2008, pp. 217-220)
[819] (Eiesland, 1994, pp. 57-67)
[820] (Lewis, 2007, pp. 31-36)
[821] (Black, 1996, pp. 46-56)
[822] (Black, 1996, pp. 15-16) which she applies to each passage under consideration.
[823] (Brock & Swinton, 2012)
[824] (Melcher et al., 2017)

accessible texts, or being included in commentaries for general use.[825] While books and commentaries can be important, I suggest that intentional friendships, within which disabled and non-disabled people can discuss and value each other's perspectives on scripture, might have greater impact in local congregations.[826] Not least, this would give disabled people a voice concerning the interpretation of scripture, something that has typically been ignored or silenced.[827] At a recent conference on faith and disability, we were asked to look at some passages of scripture through the lens of disability. In a mixed group of disabled and non-disabled people, all interested in the issue of disability in church communities, the non-disabled people quickly recognised the need to look afresh at these passages. Their 'new' perspective, however, was still heavily influenced by assumptions of how disabled people might interpret the passages, without asking the disabled people present in the group to speak out of their own experience. The lack of relationships within the group made it much harder to challenge these assumptions.

Block explicitly seeks dialogue between theology and disability studies.[828] Her critics have pointed out that this is necessarily problematic, because the majority of those involved in disability studies fail to listen to the experience of actual disabled people in faith communities, or engage with theologies of disability.[829] An alternative dialogue with disabled people within faith communities is not only possible, it is essential. While disabled people continue to be marginalised within churches, such dialogue will not readily come about without intentional fostering of friendships between disabled and non-disabled people. Creamer's work on the language of limits is useful here too.[830] The idea that all human beings are united by their inevitable experience of limits enables dialogue about the nature of these limits. The enabling of dialogue about this issue might well consolidate newly formed friendships. Intentional friendships can provide the first step towards the formation

[825] This contrasts with the range of material that addresses scriptural interpretation from the perspectives of race, gender and sexuality. *Disability: The Inclusive Church Resource* is one example of good accessible material (Hull, 2014).
[826] (Jacobs, 2019, p. 209f) emphasises the importance of enabling disabled people's lived theologies and perspectives to be heard and valued.
[827] (Jacobs, 2019, pp. 86f, 241-242)
[828] (Block, 2002, pp. 11-23)
[829] (Creamer, 2009, pp. 75-80; Reinders, 2008, pp. 75-80; Swinton, 2011, p. 288)
[830] (Creamer, 2009, pp. 31-33, 93-114)

of transformational relationships, enabling disabled and non-disabled people to 'be with' and 'work with' each other, and to foster greater participatory inclusion.

7.5.2 Mutuality

Mutuality is also important in a number of ways. One significant cause for the exclusion of disabled people is, as I have said in connection with intentionality, an assumption about their passivity.[831] This also leads to a denial of mutuality, and therefore to the exclusion of disabled people from participation in church and society.[832] One of the strengths of David Pailin's work is that he identifies this lack of mutuality. He addresses it in a proposed theology of humanity, not merely limiting to a theology of disability.[833] On that basis, he can argue for the equal worth of disabled and non-disabled people rooted in God's prior relationship with all human beings.

Eiesland affirms the importance of mutuality in her consideration of equal rights and her broader discussion about human relationships with God.[834] She emphasises both the equality and mutuality of disabled people, with both each other and God. She challenges her readers to reshape their traditional images of God as a disabled God. This can liberate disabled people and enable them to deepen their experience of friendship with God. This approach does not, however, enable non-disabled people to either change their understanding of equality with disabled people or relate to the image of the disabled God.[835]

For Black, the issue of mutuality is explored while considering the interdependency of all human beings and God's interdependency with the world.[836] Mutual friendships bring the possibility for disabled and non-disabled people to become agents of healing for, and with, one another.[837] This might take the form of physical healing, but must certainly include healing of the alienation that arises from a lack of understanding of other people's experiences.

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[831] See (Creamer, 2009, pp. 75-80) regarding physical barriers reinforcing the assumed passive role of disabled people. See Jacobs's discussion of the assumed passivity at the heart of the pastoral care model in Chapter 5.
[832] (Jacobs, 2019, p. 72f)
[833] (Pailin, 1992, pp. 15-37)
[834] (Eiesland, 1994, pp. 19-29, 70-75, 89-105)
[835] (Lewis, 2007, pp. 105-132) The mutuality within the minority group and the assertion of equality with the majority group expressed by Eiesland applies to the Deaf church as shown by Lewis, with the previous caveat of the mutuality with non-Deaf people being based on their ability and willingness to learn BSL.
[836] (Black, 1996, pp. 34-42) See page 94.
[837] (Jacobs, 2016, p. 216f)

For Creamer, the mutuality between all people is achieved through a recognition of limits arising simply from being created rather than Creator. This notion of limits certainly raises questions about our understanding of God. Creamer writes: "When we think of limits we think of limit-ed. We tend to imagine a God with limits … an impairment … is less … or defective."[838] She makes the point that if "… we imagine an unlimited God, there is a subtle implication that the more limits we have, the less we are like God." [839] This would indeed have an impact, reducing the potential for understanding a relationship with God as one of mutual friendship. Creamer notes that, "… most traditional, anthropomorphic notions of God suggest God took limits willingly … by creating or allowing free will, or by taking on personhood (and death) through Jesus."[840] She also says that "… imagining God as including limits has a number of positive advantages."[841] I want to put this together with Eiesland's view that "… disability does not mean incomplete and that difference is not dangerous."[842] For Creamer, this makes it possible to argue that the idea of limits brings to the fore the important characteristics of perseverance, strength and creativity.[843]

Mutual friendships can work with the theological approaches that emphasise equality between disabled and non-disabled people. This can arise out of a recognition of the mutual relationships within the Trinity and the mutual vulnerability of all being humans with limits.

7.5.3 Particularity

Particularity is theologically significant because it enables a constructive move from a focus on generalised relationships to specific relationships, and from general relationships between non-disabled people and disabled people, to specific relationships between particular individuals and groups. This comes out clearly in Garland-Thomson's discussion of how the particular narrative of a disabled campaigner can challenge generalised arguments for eugenics of disabled people, of the kind proposed by Peter Singer.[844] As previously noted,

[838] (Creamer, 2009, p. 112) Although not explicit, it seems that Creamer is thinking of Eiesland's metaphor of the disabled God.
[839] (Creamer, 2009, p. 112)
[840] (Creamer, 2009, p. 112) the idea that 'God took limits willingly' concerns the concept of the self-limitation of God.
[841] (Creamer, 2009, p. 112)
[842] (Eiesland, 1994, p. 47)
[843] (Creamer, 2009, pp. 112-113)
[844] (Garland-Thomson, 2015, pp. 301-303) discusses how Harriet McBryde Johnson uses the narrative of other encounters with Peter Singer to argue for the presence of disabled people in society. (Marks, 1999, p. 183) notes that the use of narrative accounts has been controversial if not carefully used.

there are a number of occasions when examples of particular relationship are used to challenge cultural assumptions concerning potential friendships between disabled and non-disabled people.[845] Sometimes, however, particularity can be problematic, such as in Eiesland's explicit particular focus on physically disabled people, which excludes people with learning disabilities.[846] Particular friendships do provide a reminder that context is a critical factor when seeking the inclusion of disabled people, and it can point the way towards wider participation beyond the local congregation.

7.6 Friendship and Fiddes's Relational Trinity

Paul Fiddes's theological work on a relational model of Trinity has significant bearing on the way friendship might be understood. Having previously connected the four theological implications of Fiddes's perspective on Trinity to disability and relationships between disabled and non-disabled people, I now want to briefly reflect on these in the light of the significance of friendship as discussed above.

The first concerns the gap between 'persons' and 'personage'. This is important because it highlights, for disabled people, the difference between self-identity and how they present to others. It also shows how non-disabled people often expect disabled people to conform to widely held assumptions and stereotypes. Understanding relationships with God as a form of friendship reduces the tension between 'persons' and 'personage'. Friendship places an emphasis on likeness and relationship rather than unlikeness and individual difference. As noted earlier, friendships enable us to see the person behind the masks that we each wear. Expectations of ourselves and others are brought closer to God's role for us as we intentionally respond to God's invitation for us to participate relationally in the trinitarian life of God.

The second implication concerns the need to balance integrity of self and openness to others. The risk is that non-disabled people can seek out disabled people simply in order to care for them, which is a distorted application of intentionality. Addressing this is a two-way process, since the fostering of friendships enables both parties to achieve the necessary balance through the mutual experience of friendship with others. In this way it is possible to

[845] For instance, the relationships between Henri Nouwen and his friend Adam, Hans Reinders and his friend Ronald, Brian Brock and his son Adam and Frances Young and her son Arthur

[846] (Eiesland, 1994, pp. 25-29) Similarly Lewis's particular focus on Deaf church and theology does not provide strong grounds for the participatory inclusion of Deaf and non-Deaf people in a single congregation.

overcome the barriers that are raised when people simply self-identify as either disabled or non-disabled. For much of the time, disabled people are very much aware of their identity as disabled, but most non-disabled people rarely become aware of their identity as non-disabled. Friendships between disabled and non-disabled people offer a real opportunity for people to identify primarily as being made in the image of God, without needing further qualifiers.

The third implication concerns the tension between the individual and the community, and highlights the importance of interdependency as a good description of the balance between the two. The mutuality of friendships emphasises how individuals can become involved in community, enriching its diversity. The metaphor of the 'progressive dance', as discussed in the previous chapter, provides a powerful image of how friendships enable this inclusion to happen.

The fourth implication concerns the tension between diversity and unity. Exclusion easily occurs when issues of real and perceived difference are not acknowledged and challenged. An overemphasis on difference can be a barrier to the inclusion of disabled people, and assumptions about normality within congregations have exacerbated this. Participation in God, as explored in the previous chapter, enables us to hold the tension of diversity and unity within church communities. Friendships provide practical ways to overcome real and perceived differences between non-disabled and disabled people while focusing on the unity of a faith community being rooted in the unity of God.

7.7 Friendship, Disability and Baptist Church Communities

Having proposed friendship that is intentional, mutual and particular as a response to the first three stages of the pastoral cycle, I now want to move to the application of friendship to Baptist church communities.

Concerning friendship, John Swinton has said that:

> … it has become clear that friendship, like all the virtues, is context dependent – that is, the word 'friendship' does not have a universal meaning. The meaning and praxis of friendship can be understood only within the context of the particular community within which it is being practised, and the specific moral tradition within which it is rooted. [847]

[847] (Swinton, 2000, p. 50)

I want to ascertain how this works out in a number of specific contexts: local church congregations; Baptist Associations; the Baptist Union and Baptist colleges; and international/ecumenical and mission contexts. There are several issues regarding the participatory inclusion of physically disabled people within Baptist church communities and I now want to show how friendship can assist in addressing them.

The Baptist Union of Great Britain is a network of more than 2,000 local churches, grouped together in thirteen regional Associations, all supported by small specialist teams based in Didcot, Oxfordshire. There are five Baptist colleges that train people for a wide range of ministries.[848] These relationships are all based on the Declaration of Principle, which has been in place with minor variations since the late nineteenth century.[849] Although I am going to examine these issues in the specific context of Baptist church communities, many of them apply to other traditions and within ecumenical settings.

7.7.1 Local Church Congregations

Interdependent local congregations are the heart of Baptist church life. I suggest there are three stages leading to participatory inclusion in a typical Baptist church: welcome by a local congregation; involvement in the life of the local congregation; and involvement in relationships with other churches and local communities. These form a pathway from exclusion towards a significant level of participatory inclusion in the community's life.

Friendship is important from the start, in the initial welcome of disabled people into the church community. There might not be any existing friendships between members and disabled people when attending a church for the first time.[850] There needs to be an intentional welcome using appropriate language, tone of voice and body language. This can be expressed in a variety of ways: avoiding language that unnecessarily focuses on difference; avoiding generalised assumptions about disabled people; talking directly with disabled people rather than to or through their companions; ensuring dialogue rather than

[848] See https://www.baptist.org.uk/Groups/332828/Training_Overview.aspx accessed 19/02/2020.
[849] For a discussion of the significance of the Declaration of Principle see (Kidd, 1996). The text of the Declaration of Principle is given on (p. 10)
[850] In the discussion that follows I am using 'members/membership' as a broad term to include both the formal members of a local Baptist congregation and those who attend regularly and participate in the life of the church who, while not formal members, consider themselves to belong to the congregation. The change from historic patterns of formal membership to a discourse of 'belonging' in a covenant relationship is examined by (Jackson, 2009).

monologue; and adopting an appropriate posture, such as kneeling/sitting to talk to a person who uses a wheelchair rather than talking down to them. Such intentional attention to welcome is essential, and it is the responsibility of those who first meet visitors and potential members. Care must be taken to ensure that such a welcome does not single out non-disabled church members as the only ones who can provide an *active* welcome and disabled people are stereotyped as *passive* recipients.[851] The importance of welcome is not over after an initial greeting, it continues to apply to both services and other church activities.

These proposals for initiating relationships are underpinned by the realisation that what is being sought is a mutual friendship grounded in God's offer of friendship to all people. The aim is to open up the possibility of a mutual relationship. Once again, the level of mutuality between disabled and non-disabled people is always influenced by the language, sociological and theological understanding of disability, as we explored in Part 2. Sadly, some of the attitudes and actions of non-disabled people towards disabled people are very deeply ingrained. From my personal experience of being welcomed to various congregations, these attitudes can be related to the age of those I meet. Older people in the UK tend to use language and reflect understandings of disability that centre on impairment, with its emphasis on the differences between disabled and non-disabled people. Younger people tend to be more aware of the impact of their language and attitudes. They often show an understanding of disability in terms of relationship, the focus being on the disabled person rather than their disability or impairment. There is a pressing need for churches to teach and model inclusive language, social understandings of disability, and theological approaches that are inclusive of disabled people. Everyone needs to be equally affirmed as being in the image of God. If this is done well, there will be a shift, away from ministry to disabled people done by a few church members, towards ministry with disabled people working alongside non-disabled people.

The mutuality of disabled and non-disabled people will always be undermined by unhelpful generalisations. A church community might believe that they welcome 'all disabled people' seeming consistent with their acknowledgement of a Social Model approach, recognising the significance of the community's attitudes towards disabled people in general. Yet, the same church community, can then find themselves over generalising about disabled people, by

[851] (Jacobs, 2019, p. 204)

referring to them as 'the disabled', for instance. While superficially this might appear to suggest a commitment to welcoming all disabled people, it is easy to lose sight of particular people and their particular contexts. This is where particularity of friendship is so especially important. The welcome a disabled person receives when she or he first attends a church needs to be appropriate to *this* specific disabled person rather than *any* disabled person. A friendly welcome, that is intentional and mutual, is being offered to a particular person, at a specific time and in a specific context. This will in turn shape the dialogue, conversation and attitudes towards that person in ways that genuinely sustain the offer of friendship.

The next stage is to ensure that disabled newcomers are enabled to participate alongside non-disabled people as fully as they would like in the life of the local church. If a church community has welcomed a disabled person, following proposals like those suggested above, the initial relationship that has been established has the potential to develop into a genuine friendship, but this will not happen without continuing effort and care. There should not be any differences between the ways that disabled and non-disabled people become involved in church as friendships are formed. However, there might well be issues arising because of perceived otherness between disabled and non-disabled people that will need to be addressed, so intentionality remains paramount. For example, while various aspects of church life may be publicised and participation sought, there needs to be an intentional approach to the inclusion of disabled people, deliberately exploring how they can best actively participate. This may include rethinking where and how activities and roles take place and making people aware that these factors have been carefully considered. In the church where I recently served as an elder and trustee, there was a deliberate discussion between myself and the minister concerning the way that these roles had previously been carried out. Some aspects of the role needed to be changed in order for me to participate fully as an elder and trustee. The duty elder, for example, was usually responsible for dealing with any issues of pastoral care that arose before or during a service, when the minister's attention was primarily on the service. When I was duty elder this part of the role was intentionally and helpfully carried out by someone else, often one of the 'off duty' elders. Regarding many roles and activities in church life, there will need to be intentional thought given to enable physical access and the possible adaptation of a role or activity in order to include a specific disabled person.

Mutuality continues to be important at each stage of enabling inclusion, and here it takes the form of fostering ministry *with*, rather than ministry *to*, disabled people. I am assuming that a disabled person arriving in a church community is freely choosing to do so, and that they themselves are the agents of intentionality.[852] If a disabled person intentionally seeks to attend a church community passively then, as with any non-disabled person, this should be respected. There is a considerable body of literature, however, which is designed to help a local congregation encourage participatory inclusion of all members, much of which is applicable with only minor modifications to enable disabled and non-disabled people to participate alongside one another.[853]

Participatory inclusion in the life of a church community will also enable disabled people to become involved in the church's engagement with the local community. This is where mutuality and particularity become especially important. Through mutual participation between particular people, the intentionality of both disabled and non-disabled people can change from passive to active engagement. This is another example of a shift from 'doing for' to 'being with', and clearly needs to be reflected across the board in the way that churches as a whole engage with their local communities. I want to suggest that friendships within a church also have the potential to significantly shape the relationship between churches and their local communities.[854] The participation of disabled people in a church's engagement with its local community will inevitably enrich that engagement, and will show other disabled people the potential for participatory inclusion in a particular congregation.

Baptist congregations need to ensure that disabled people are fully able to participate in the regular celebration of communion and in the act of baptism.[855] The idea that communion in Baptist churches can be linked with the image of God's friends celebrating a meal together is reinforced by the Baptist tradition of distributing the elements to the congregation, the plate and cup(s) being passed from person to person.[856] This mutual serving of one another is

[852] See Chapter 2 where evidence for this is discussed.
[853] Purpose Driven Church material (Warren, 1995) and various discipleship courses come to mind.
[854] For instance, by encouraging church members to join local community groups or engage with on-line groups such as 'Friends of …'.
[855] See (Fiddes, 2003, pp. 157-192) for an examination of Baptist understandings of communion or Lord's Supper. (Fiddes, 2003, pp. 107-124, 125-156) examines baptism and whether it is inclusive or exclusive. (Summers, 2009, pp. 164-172) makes a powerful argument for seeing communion as a meal among friends.
[856] (Jacobs, 2019, pp. 105f, 163-173) notes that the method of distribution can be a significant barrier to the inclusion of disabled people, both for those who preside and those who receive communion. See also (Eiesland, 1994, pp. 112-113)

intended as a reflection of Christ's servanthood, as well as a way that friends might share with one another. This method of distributing the elements also overcomes a potential barrier that some church buildings present, when physically disabled people are expected to come to a communion rail.[857] I suggest that friendship enables and encourages disabled people to explore the experience of baptism and the practical issues that this might raise.

We must also consider how disabled people can be enabled to participate in aspects of church life beyond the local congregation, in the wider church. This might be participating in the life of the local Baptist Association, or through local ecumenical engagements. It might also be possible to participate in Baptist Union Assemblies at the national level, or in other aspects of the life of the Union. The recent re-branding of the Baptist Union as 'Baptists Together' might suggest that this is something very much hoped for in the wider denomination. It is essential to identify the gifts and talents of particular disabled people, through the fostering of friendships, so that they can be used for the greatest possible benefit of the local congregation, other churches and wider community.

I have a particular interest in the role that friendship might play in the early stages of recognising and responding to a call to ordained ministry for a disabled person.[858] The process as it has operated through most of British Baptist history begins in the local church.[859] It is only in the last half century that a number of disabled people have been ordained in any of the major denominations represented in the UK.[860] It is self-evident that if disabled people are excluded from participation in the life of the local church community, then the gifts, talents and character indicating a call to ministry are extremely unlikely to be

[857] (Eiesland, 1994, p. 107f) suggests that the image of the disabled God reminds us that the church as the body of God is a broken and imperfect body. She suggests that communion, where we recognise the crucified and resurrected Christ, enables non-disabled people to begin to identify with the experience and perspective of disabled people. She emphasises the importance of disabled people being included in the celebration of communion as a reflection of the diversity of the church as the Body of Christ.

[858] I recognise that ordained ministry, in a variety of expressions, is not the only form of recognised ministry where disabled people can serve, but space restricts my consideration of this particular aspect.

[859] (Briggs, 1994; R. E. Brown, 1986; White, 1996) discuss the central role of the local church from the seventeenth to the twentieth century.

[860] I previously acknowledged the challenges of exploring the history of disabled people's exclusion from or inclusion in society. See Chapter 4. There is considerable difficulty in determining whether and how many disabled people have been ordained ministers prior to the late twentieth century. Those disabled people who were ordained are certainly not well known.

recognised.[861] If they are actively included in a local church, then there is the potential for such a call to be identified and mutually acknowledged by the church and the particular individual. For disabled people who sense a call to such ministries, it will be among friends where their gifting and character are most likely to be discerned, with their disability remaining at most a secondary issue. In order to overcome some of the assumptions about disabled people there has to be an intentional and mutual commitment to follow an appropriate process of discernment, taking account of the particular individual.[862] While the discernment of a call normally begins in a particular congregation, it can be helpful to engage with other local churches. The friendships between local churches provide opportunities to preach, lead services and engage in other aspects of church life. Beyond this, friendships between local churches, the local Association, and Regional Ministers enable the next stage of the process.

While the recognition and response to a call to ordained ministry often begins as an informal process, it soon becomes a formal one. A potential candidate for ministry is often appointed to a formal role within the church, for example as elder or trustee, in order to begin to test their calling. The church then gathers as a covenant community of friends to recognise and recommend the candidate for consideration by the wider churches within the local Baptist Association.

In my own case, it was through friendships within the local congregation and the relationships between local churches and their ministers that I was able to explore and respond to a calling to ordained ministry. My experience persuades me of the potential in fostering friendships to enable disabled people to become fully involved in the life of a local church.

7.7.2 Baptist Associations

Baptist Associations have a history rooted in the early life of Baptist churches in the UK in the seventeenth century. They emerged when churches began to formalise relationships between one another. It is therefore appropriate to consider an Association as a gathering of local churches in covenant relationship rather than as an institution exerting power and

[861] (Franklin, 2008, p. 17) argues in a paper on gender and ministry that to put gender before gifting impacts the ministry of Jesus through us. He suggests that no innate human capacity or quality should inhibit being a minister. Disability should therefore not be a bar to ministry.
[862] A number of barriers to ordination are discussed by (Jacobs, 2019, pp. 87f, 169f).

influence over local churches.[863] It is significant to note that Associations arose out of the relationships between churches, ministers and congregation members themselves. It is not surprising, then, to discover that friendships played an important role in their formation, and that this can continue to develop through the inclusion of disabled people.

Baptist Associations, and those who work within them, have a responsibility to model healthy relationships with the member churches. These relationships can also be helpfully compared to friendships. Regional ministers, and others active in the life of an Association, need to be friends with both ministers and churches and encourage friendships between churches. Given the absence of a hierarchical structure, the engagement between Associations and churches can only be based on mutual relationships. This requires a clear intention to relate, initiated by both regional ministers and the churches in their Association. Unfortunately this is not always reflected in local churches, where many consider independence to take priority over interdependence.[864] Through intentional and mutual engagement, a wide range of issues can be addressed for the benefit of both local churches and Associations.

While so far these observations have applied to general relationships within local Associations, they also have particular relevance for the participatory inclusion of disabled people within and beyond the local church. Given the limited resources available, Associations are always reliant on strong mutual relationships with particular churches. If, therefore, particular churches have already begun to enable the participatory inclusion of disabled people, this can become a resource for other churches in the Association too. At a national level the experience of the Disability Justice Group (now re-named the Disability Justice Hub), of which I have been an active member, is that the importance of inclusion of physically disabled people is not widely recognised.[865] For some time, the inclusion of people with learning disabilities did have a much higher profile through the valuable work of the

[863] (R. E. Brown, 1986; Payne, 1982; White, 1996) give accounts of the relational development and origins of Baptist Associations. The relational aspect of Association life is currently in tension with the institutional nature of their existence as charitable bodies. (Briggs, 1994, p. 199f) suggests that the institutional nature of Associations became apparent in the nineteenth century. (Kidd, 1996, pp. 14-15) suggests that it is appropriate to think of Associations and the Baptist Union being in covenant relationships, emphasising mutuality among participants.

[864] (Colwell, 2009, pp. 15-16) addresses this tendency when discussing Barrie White's contribution to (Tidball, 1987).

[865] This contrasts with the relatively high profile of racial and gender justice issues within local churches, Associations and the Baptist Union.

Baptist Union Initiative with People with Learning Disabilities (BUild), which has sadly now ceased to exist.[866] The recently re-constituted Disability Justice Hub now seeks to address issues of participatory inclusion of all disabled people, and works alongside the Racial and Women's Justice hubs in seeking a more holistic approach to inclusion. Through the friendships between these groups and with Baptist churches, Associations and colleges, it is hoped that there will be a more consistent and effective approach towards the inclusion of previously excluded or marginalised groups, including disabled people.

Associations can be a resource for churches regarding inclusion of disabled people. They can function as a resource encouraging churches to engage in training, mission and fund-raising for projects.[867] They are, therefore, able to encourage engagement in learning and action beyond the scope or resources of a local church congregation. This might entail providing resources or facilitating the work of an organisation such as the Christian disability charity 'Through the Roof'. From my experience as a trustee of a local Association and a member of the Baptist Union Council, the Associations actually have more influence in local churches than the Baptist Union itself. Any possibility for strengthening relational links between local churches and the Baptist Union, which is often seen as distant and even irrelevant, can only be beneficial. Associations, like churches, tend to focus far too exclusively on their own members. With limited resources and a reliance on volunteers, it is hardly surprising that Associations do not always relate closely with one another. This can lead to a lack of consistency around such issues as inclusion and proper attention to the participation of disabled people.

The process of settlement of ministers into local church ministry after completing training can also be significantly shaped by the existence of friendships. The friendships between regional ministers, potential ministers and local churches can be critical at this stage. Unless churches have prior knowledge of, or a relationship with, a potential minister, they are going to meet for the first time as strangers, their knowledge of one another limited to the minster's and church's profiles, already exchanged through a regional minister. In such a situation, mutual friendships can facilitate a more personal introduction, especially of disabled ministers. This is especially important because, when a disabled person meets a

[866] See Chapter 2. BUild started in 1983 and closed in 2016. For a brief history see https://www.baptist.org.uk/Articles/471063/To_everything_a.aspx accessed 20/02/2020.
[867] In a similar way to Anglican diocese and Methodist districts.

stranger, the perception of their disability nearly always dominates.[868] If a church and the potential minister are introduced as mutual friends of the regional minister, then there is the potential for the primary focus to be on their gifts and skills as potential ministers rather than on their disability.

If the relationship between regional ministers and churches is experienced as friendship, then the issues raised by a particular minister's profile may be addressed before they become barriers to settlement. For instance, I have discovered when meeting deacons in some churches seeking settlement that they have many unchallenged assumptions about what a wheelchair user can and cannot do. Some have assumed that I cannot do pastoral visiting, for example.[869] A regional minister can have a crucial role in such circumstances through intentional, mutual and particular friendship with both church and minister. A blind colleague found out that deacons were concerned about him getting lost in a small market town, or even around the church building. Real friendship between regional ministers and churches can assist in addressing issues such as these, by exploiting the benefits of mutual trust. Sometimes only their trust can form a sufficient basis for them to give serious consideration to disabled people in the first place. The Baptist Union is currently making significant changes to the settlement process.[870] My hope is that the new profile format shared prior to a decision to meet, which, for example, withholds most personal information, including disabilities, might produce more just outcomes. The new system will reflect aspects of the 'blind recruitment'[871] process that has become increasingly common in businesses.

The settlement process has needed to deal with issues raised by the Equalities Act (2010), under which disability is a protected characteristic, and the impact these issues may have on the appointment of a disabled person as a minister. This is complicated when, as in most Baptist churches, the minister is seen as a 'post holder' rather than an employee, and this has led to considerable uncertainty among churches. My experience is that churches continue to state my use of a wheelchair as a valid reason for not proceeding with an appointment. In secular employment this would be a clear breach of the Act and could result

[868] This is another instance of a 'focusing illusion' being a barrier to relationships and inclusion.
[869] During initial discussions with a church I also ensure that they know that I can drive without assistance.
[870] Examples of the new guidelines and forms are included in Appendix D.
[871] In light of my discussion of metaphors of disability the widely used phrase 'blind recruitment' would be an inappropriate term.

in an employment tribunal hearing. There is still a great deal of work to be done around these issues. I believe, however, that the fostering of mutual friendships between Association staff and churches would facilitate conversations involving a potential disabled minister, which might help prevent this situation leading to discrimination.

7.7.3 Baptist Union and Colleges

The current Baptist Union was formed by bringing together two theologically diverse groups of Baptist churches towards the end of the eighteenth century. Today it is held together by a Declaration of Principle, which is covenantal rather than credal in nature. As a result, the focus in the Baptist Union is on relationships rather than on doctrinal statements.[872] Relationships have been under pressure because of different responses to the UK government's recognition of same-sex civil partnerships, and more recently of same-sex marriages.[873] Some see the Declaration of Principle as outdated and irrelevant, arguing that it needs to be replaced by a more credal approach.[874] If the basis of covenant relationship becomes significantly more credal, this could well lead to more exclusion rather than inclusion. If creeds and confessions become a test of orthodoxy, the Baptist Union will find itself in an entirely different culture.[875] There are those who see recent discussions about covenant relationships as merely a distraction from more significant issues of truth.[876] It would be my own hope that emphasising covenant relationships as friendships that are

[872] (Clarke, 2002a; Fiddes, 1985a; Kidd, 1996) express a range of views on the role of covenants and creeds in Baptist life. (Goodliff, 2019) provides a detailed discussion of their influence on UK Baptist understandings of covenant relationships during the 1990s.

[873] (Allison-Glenny et al., 2017) provides a perspective on this issue which takes an inclusive approach. I am not aware of a formal statement or academic paper which takes the opposite approach. The Baptist Union issued a statement on the registration of church buildings for same-sex marriage arising out of discussion at the March 2016 Baptist Union Council https://www.baptist.org.uk/Publisher/File.aspx?ID=212480 accessed 18/06/2020.

[874] Recollection of comments made during discussions at a Baptist Union Council regarding sexuality in the light of changes to same sex marriage legislation 'Notes from BU Council March 2014'. A similar discussion occurred in 2016 'Baptist Union Council Notes October 2016', under the heading 'Same Sex Marriage Reflections.' A clarification of the broad nature of the Declaration of Principle was laid out in 'Guidance for Accredited and Nationally Recognised Ministry, The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013' presented to Council in March 2017, contained within 'Council Reports March 2017'. Further discussion on related matters indicates tension with the Declaration of Principle 'Council Reports November 2018', under the heading 'Theological Gatekeeping'. (Hayden, 1985) discusses the link between creeds and confessions, arguing for a return to a credal basis for our covenant relationships within the Baptist Union. (Beasley-Murray, 1987) made a call for a contemporary Baptist confession of faith. (Colwell, 2009) takes a very cautious approach to confessions, noting Beasley-Murray's participation in the report *Baptists and Unity* in 1967, which states that there is no evidence for the early use of confessions and creeds in worship (p.14). He concludes by arguing against the development of a contemporary confession.

[875] (Colwell, 2009, p. 18)

[876] As indicated by the views expressed in personal conversations with a range of members of Baptist Union Council since the 2016 statement.

intentional, mutual and particular could be helpful at such a time. The language and practise of friendship can facilitate the inclusion of not only disabled people and others who are marginalised, but those with different theological perspectives and traditions.

Instead of the idea of our covenant relationships being understood in abstract terms, the analogy of friendships provides a way of understanding the relevance to individuals and churches. Our covenant relationships with others arise from God's gift of covenant relationships with creation and humanity.[877] Our friendships with one another have their source in God's offer of friendship with all of humanity, which suggests that it is appropriate to express the former in the language of the latter.

7.7.4 International/Ecumenical and Mission

The Baptist focus on covenant relationships has significance for relationships with Baptists beyond the UK and with ecumenical relationships more widely. If God's covenant extends to the whole of creation, then friendships have a role to play in both mission and the stewardship of natural resources.

Ecumenical friendships have become increasingly important in many Baptist congregations, as fewer and fewer people within a local congregation have a significant Baptist background or any understanding of the historical roots. A 'consumerist' approach to church is often problematic, but it may also bring experiences of different traditions into creative dialogue. The openness to others and the dialogue between traditions is an important manifestation of friendship.

Friendships, or the offer of them, within the local community may also affect the inclusion of disabled people well beyond the fringes of church communities. I referred earlier to the experience of the journalist, Damon Rose.[878] He was confronted by a Christian, who asked if he could pray for Damon to be healed and to have his sight restored. His research, resulting in articles and radio programmes made it abundantly clear that what he and other disabled people would have preferred was an offer of genuine friendship, rather than being the objects of a stranger's prayers for healing. This would have enabled a positive relationship with a church community, rather than a hostile one provoked by assumptions about the

[877] (Fiddes, 2000, p. 111)
[878] (Rose, 2019a, 2019b) See page 110.

necessity of healing. Friendships can also seek to address the experiences of loneliness that was recognised as an issue for many disabled people in Chapter 2.

7.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, which forms the fourth response stage of this pastoral cycle, I have proposed the potential of friendship in terms of the three themes that emerged in the body of my thesis. I have shown how intentionality, mutuality and particularity in friendship can help address many of the barriers to inclusion of disabled people. I have sought to make connections between friendship and a range of theologies of disability. All along, my aim has been to show how such friendships can play a vital role in fostering the participatory inclusion of disabled people in Baptist church communities. Friendships have a significant role in almost every part of Baptist life. The friendships between Association staff, particularly regional ministers, and local churches can facilitate the inclusion of disabled people beyond their local context. The understanding of our wider covenant relationships in terms of friendships can facilitate participatory inclusion within the Baptist Union and Baptist Colleges, in ecumenical and international contexts, and a shaping of the wider mission of the church. Friendships which are intentional, mutual and particular express ideas embedded deep in Baptist history, and should play an important role in future cohesion as a movement.

Conclusion and Indication of Further Research

Chapter 8 Conclusion

This thesis has been driven by the need to transform the experiences of physically disabled people in Baptist church communities. My motivation has been to enable the liberation of physically disabled people from passive attendants into active participants in the life of the church, local community and beyond. This drove the decision to use the pastoral cycle as a methodology, with its origins in liberation theology.

Having completed the four stages of the pastoral cycle methodology, I will briefly review the main themes of the thesis and draw out my conclusions, both from the individual stages and from the overall thesis. I will then propose some avenues for further research and practical work, which might usefully build on the foundations I have provided.

8.1 Experiences of Exclusion and Inclusion

I entered the first stage of the pastoral cycle with a critical reflection on my own experiences of exclusion and inclusion, identifying issues relating to the physical environment, use of language, and sociological and theological understandings of disability. Drawing on material from a variety of sources I indicated that the experience of exclusion was common among disabled people in Baptist churches, other denominations and wider society.

There was, however, no straightforward separation of the experiences of exclusion and inclusion. A rather more complex situation began to emerge, as suggested by continuities and discontinuities between my experiences and those of other disabled people. Disabled people experience inclusion in some contexts and exclusion in others. Even when experiencing inclusion, there were indications that this is not always on the same grounds as the inclusion of non-disabled people.[879] The key outcome of this initial stage was to identify the importance of relationships between disabled and non-disabled people. It is important to see disabled people as 'like' non-disabled people, rather than as 'unlike' or 'other', and this underlies the significance of relationships.

This enables a change of focus, from an individual's perceived needs to how they are able to contribute to the life of faith communities. The emerging research question focused on how

[879] (Jacobs, 2019, pp. 163-174) discusses the experience of disabled ministers who were perceived to do ministry in a way that was not 'normal', echoing (Herzog, 1998).

friendship, as a particular expression of general relationships, can foster participatory inclusion of physically disabled people.

8.2 Exploring the Barriers to Inclusion

In light of the first stage, I began to focus on exploring the way that relationships in general, and friendships in particular, are inhibited by the way that disability is understood, and how this shapes interactions between disabled and non-disabled people. Seeking to go beyond the usual discussion of physical access to church buildings, I explored how language, sociological and theological understandings of disability create barriers to the formation of friendships.

While there are obvious ways in which descriptive language can emphasise the differences between disabled and non-disabled people, there are less obvious ways in which metaphorical language can also emphasise differences rather than similarities.[880] Metaphorical language, referring directly or indirectly to disabled people, can therefore inhibit the formation of relationships between disabled and non-disabled people.

Sociological understandings of disability have changed very significantly during the last 50 years.[881] A historical understanding, grounded in individualistic and medical perspectives, is still influential, and no single, overarching model of disability has yet been found to address the diverse experiences of disabled people. While Social and related models provide a welcome focus on the attitudes of society towards disabled people, they do not fully address relationships between individuals or within specific communities.

A survey of some theological approaches to the understanding of disability, that have been proposed to move from exclusion to inclusion, revealed that relationships are once again a key issue.[882] Although aspects of friendship have been researched with regards to people with learning disabilities, there is little evidence of its successful application to people with physical disabilities.

The exploration of the language, sociology and theology of disability led me to the conclusion that there is no single approach that can foster the participatory inclusion of

[880] Chapter 3.
[881] Chapter 4.
[882] Chapter 5.

disabled people. The wider field of disability studies indicates that there is a diverse and complex range of influences shaping the understanding of disability. These influence the relationships that exist among diverse groups of disabled people, and the formation of friendships between disabled and non-disabled people.

Rather than any given approach leading to a more inclusive relationship between disabled and non-disabled people, the exploration stage of this pastoral cycle led me to the conclusion that fostering friendships has the potential to address the barriers I had identified. This involves drawing on insights gained from a variety of different approaches. Barriers identified by disability studies, such as the portrayal of disabled people by various forms of media, also be reduced by engaging with the fostering of friendships.

8.3 Theological Reflection on Trinitarian Relationships

The survey of the sociological and theological approaches to disability showed that the approaches that start from the perspective of particular groups of disabled people have limited general application. I argued that a more productive approach is to start with an understanding of God, who includes all people within a universal offer of love. Such an approach was informed by the work of Paul Fiddes, who provides a distinctive perspective on the relational nature of God as Trinity.[883] This provided a way of paying close attention to relationships within the Trinity, using the concept of 'persons *as* relation' and the offer of participatory inclusion that God offers to all of creation in covenant relationships.[884] This understanding of God as Trinity shapes an inclusive understanding of covenant relationships and provides a way of understanding Baptist ecclesiologies in terms of covenant friendships.

By drawing on our historic Baptist roots, I emphasised the importance of covenant relationships within and between local church congregations. If, as Fiddes suggests, God intentionally invites all people to participate in a covenant relationship, then the characteristics of this will be expressed in the relationships within and beyond the local congregation. Central to this is the intentional, mutual and particular relationships between those God has called to form such congregations. The Social Model of Disability defines disability as a social construct in terms of attitudes and relationships of society towards those who have a wide variety of impairments. This understanding has already been

[883] (Fiddes, 2000)
[884] See Chapter 6.

adopted by many churches with regards to gender and racial equality. I have argued that the equality of disabled people within a church community is best enabled through relationships which are intentional, mutual and particular. This approach enables the pastoral concerns identified by Fiddes to be applied to disabled people.[885]

8.4 Response: Friendship as a Way of Fostering Participatory Inclusion

The final stage of the pastoral cycle set out a proposal for friendship as a way of enabling participatory inclusion of disabled people. The significance of relationships between disabled and non-disabled people emerged from the first stage of the pastoral cycle and the barriers to the formation of relationships were explored in the second stage. The third stage provided a foundation for the formation of intentional, mutual and particular friendships grounded in a relational trinitarian theology, set within the context of a covenantal and gathered church ecclesiology.

The common metaphors used to describe the church include 'body', 'building', and 'family', to which I proposed the addition of church as 'a community of friends of God'.[886] The frequently used family metaphor, with the language of brothers and sisters in Christ, has an intrinsic focus on familial similarity. While this has some advantages for fostering mutual relationships between disabled and non-disabled people, it does not properly allow for holding diversity, of either disabled or non-disabled people, in tension with the unity of a congregation. Drawing on the pastoral implications of Fiddes's perspective on God as Trinity, I suggested that relationships based in such a trinitarian foundation have the potential to handle this tension in creative ways. By exploring the nature of friendship, I have proposed that friendship is a particular expression of God's universal love. Following Hans Reinders, an extrinsic gift of friendship must be intentionally extended to other people based on our mutual dependence on God and one another in community.

One of the advantages of friendship as a metaphor for covenant relationships is the range of intensity and intimacy that is included in our experiences of friendship. These range from casual to the most intimate, from those founded around a common experience or context to those which bring diverse groups of people together. In our contemporary context this will

[885] See Chapter 6 pages 124f and 142f.
[886] (Summers, 2009, pp. 164-172) extends his suggestion of communion as being a meal among friends.

not only include face-to-face friendships but also those which are primarily or wholly formed through social media.

In summary, the material reviewed in the first stage of the cycle identified relationships between disabled and non-disabled people as important. The second stage identified barriers to the formation of friendship that were found to be rooted in the way understandings of disability are shaped by inappropriate use of metaphorical language and adherence to problematic sociological and theological understandings of disability. A particular perspective on the relational nature of God as Trinity, as described in stage three, enabled the focus to be placed on relationships rather than disabled people as individuals or groups, and the invitation by God to participate in covenant relationships within the church, world and all creation. In stage four, friendships, understood as a gift from God, which are intentionally formed with an emphasis on the mutuality of all parties and a recognition of particular people and their contexts, were shown to offer the potential to increase the participatory inclusion of disabled people.

8.5 Fostering Friendships

I am not suggesting that friendship is the single alternative to all the theological approaches which were surveyed and discussed in earlier chapters.[887] While some of these approaches pay little attention to the importance of friendship, others indicate that relationships and friendships play a significant role. What this thesis provides is a model of friendship which can work alongside these theological approaches.

For instance friendship, as outlined in this thesis, can ensure that an approach to hospitality as a way of fostering inclusion does not remain based on active non-disabled hosts and passive disabled guests.[888] The mutuality of friendship challenges the 'pastoral care model' which reinforces an 'us' and 'them' approach. This has been identified as being a common approach to the passive inclusion of disabled people in church communities.[889]

[887] Jacobs's research indicates that friendship is not a panacea, as some disabled people struggle with social settings and some find access to social spaces problematic. (Jacobs, 2019, pp. 125f ,130f) discusses the issues arising from difficulty with social interactions in house-groups or during post-service refreshments.
[888] (Block, 2002) The imbalance between host and guest is a potential downside of Block's approach. (Jacobs, 2019, p. 168f) suggests that such 'conditional hospitality' of disabled people arises from churches' use of a pastoral care model which shapes their relationship with disabled people.
[889] (Jacobs, 2019) See page 105.

There is a need for both practical action and an inclusive, theological understanding of disability. While other justice issues are discussed at church, Association and Baptist Union levels, the importance of disability justice needs to be raised too. Historical understandings of disability have left a problematic legacy which needs to be acknowledged, and appropriate inclusive understandings need to be promoted in a variety of ways.

Once the importance of the participatory inclusion of disabled people is recognised then churches can begin to encourage the formation of such friendships. These friendships can help to improve participatory inclusion in local congregations, working with other churches, in local communities, within Associations and in the wider settings of the Baptist Union, colleges, and international contexts.

8.6 Further Avenues of Research

There is some evidence of a lower proportion of disabled people present in Baptist church communities than in the general population. There is a need for field research into different aspects of this issue.

It is important to identify, through quantitative research, the numbers and diversity of disabled people present in church congregations and the nature of their participation in various aspects of church life. One of the significant reasons for quantifying the number of disabled people and the nature of their disability is to raise the profile of the issue of the exclusion of disabled people.

There is a need for parallel qualitative research that further engages with the experiences of disabled people in Baptist church communities, with an emphasis on participation and friendships. This would build on the research done by Naomi Jacobs, which predominantly focused on disabled people in Anglican church contexts.[890] Alongside this, one avenue would be research among Baptist ministers and other local church leaders, which would explore their own understanding of disability and their attitudes towards the participatory inclusion of disabled people. This could build on my research to explore the use of language directly and indirectly related to disability, as well as the acknowledged and unacknowledged

[890] (Jacobs, 2019) I recognise that not all of her participants are Anglicans.

sociological and theological models of disability that hinder or foster the participatory inclusion of disabled people.

These strands of research can then be used to develop a strategy for fostering participatory inclusion through friendships, alongside the existing physical and theological approaches to inclusion. Given the nature of the organisation of Baptist churches, Associations, Baptist Union and colleges, this would be most effectively done by local Associations alongside local congregations, within a broad approach supported by the Baptist Union Council and Trustees.[891] One possible approach for developing, testing, and implementing such a strategy would be through the theological action research model proposed by Helen Cameron et al in their book *Talking about God in Practice*.[892] This approach would facilitate another pass around the pastoral cycle, with a clear focus on transformation through collaboration.[893] I believe that this would be a particularly effective way of working with an Association,[894] as it has the potential to raise the awareness of the need for the participatory inclusion of disabled people in the churches that constitute the Association and then facilitate that inclusion.[895] Through identifying and engaging with 'four voices of theology', this process could lead to renewed theology and practice.[896] This approach identifies continuities and discontinuities between these four voices, and uses them to foster a more coherent understanding of both the theology of disability and the practice of participatory inclusion.

[891] From my experience as a minister in a local congregation, a trustee of an Association and member of the Baptist Union Council I think that although the Baptist Union Council and trustees can provide an overall direction to work for inclusion, they are not able to effectively change the practice in local church congregations. Associations have a relationship with their constituent churches and can both model and support changes to practice and theology that foster inclusion.
[892] (H. Cameron, Bhatti, Duce, Sweeney, & Watkin, 2010)
[893] (H. Cameron et al., 2010, pp. 27-28, 39-29, 49-50, 58-60)
[894] (H. Cameron et al., 2010, pp. 109-137) gives three examples of how this approach has been used in a parish, a diocese and faith-based organisation.
[895] (H. Cameron et al., 2010, pp. 70-74)This approach uses the idea of an 'inside group', those involved the practice of the organisation(s) and 'outsider group', those facilitating the research.
[896] (H. Cameron et al., 2010, p. 53f) The four voices are: normative theology – what a group names as authoritative; formal theology – theological writing and dialogue with other disciplines; espoused theology – what a group *articulates* about its beliefs; operant theology – the theology embedded in the *actual* practice of the group.

There is an opportunity for specific research in the light of church buildings closing due to the Covid-19 restrictions, during 2020.[897] There are opportunities to research the relationship between face-to-face and on-line friendships and their role in the inclusion of disabled people in Baptist church communities.[898] Potential lines of enquiry might include:

- Do pre-existing face-to-face friendships enable on-line friendships to sustain participatory inclusion?
- Will new on-line friendships that arise during the period of church closures translate into face-to-face friendships which foster participatory inclusion?
- What is the broader role of technology in the inclusion of disabled people in church communities? Does technology assist or hinder participatory inclusion?[899]
- Will new on-line friendships be sustained and enable those who continue to be unable to be physically present with others to belong to the church community in meaningful ways?

Although more academic research is needed due to the deep-seated and persistent negative understandings of disability, there is also a need to promote existing resources on fostering inclusion of disabled people that are available from a number of organisations such as 'Through the Roof'. Identifying and sharing good practice that already exists in some churches can be beneficial. Where necessary, accessible resources should be produced so

[897] A recent article by Naomi Jacobs raises questions about whether churches who have responded very quickly to these restrictions might now be more willing to make changes that enable disabled people to be more fully included in church life https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2020/1-may/features/features/disabled-people-say-welcome-to-our-world accessed 01/05/2020.

[898] Restrictions that prevent churches physically gathering together are in place at the time of writing. They started in mid-March 2020 and began to be eased in July 2020. Many churches have developed ways of relating together through various forms of social media and internet-based resources.

[899] There is evidence emerging that some disabled people have been more able to participate and gain a sense of belonging in on-line church communities than when church communities only met physically. This is in stark contrast to emerging evidence of the way that disabled people have suffered disproportionately during this period. For example, two recent articles in the Christian and secular press:
https://www.christiantoday.com/article/disabled.people.have.suffered.terribly.during.covid.19.the.church.cannot.stay.silent/135159.htm?fbclid=IwAR0ro26dGJyUBa8VD5QzbkuAcN1h7PCfxb8MXDdrUKLMX76Oae_JaxeyzNs accessed 10/07/2020.
https://inews.co.uk/opinion/shocking-silence-over-the-thousands-of-people-with-disabilities-who-have-died-during-coronavirus-483575
accessed 10/07/2020.
https://inews.co.uk/opinion/shocking-silence-over-the-thousands-of-people-with-disabilities-who-have-died-during-coronavirus-483575 accessed 10/07/2020.

that churches can explore the challenges of fostering participatory inclusion of disabled people.

This thesis started out with critical reflections on my own experience: as a person who uses a wheelchair, a Christian, a minister within the UK Baptist tradition, a husband and a friend of both disabled and non-disabled people. Researching and writing this thesis has given me hope that the problematic legacies of language, sociology and theology can be overcome.

During my lifetime, disabled people have become far more widely included in British society. Even while I was writing this thesis, there has been an increase of interest and scholarship in the field of disability theology.[900] The task ahead is for this growing body of work to be embodied in the life of Baptist church communities and the wider ecumenical context, so that physically disabled people are able to participate more fully in God's universal covenant of grace and love. I am convinced that fostering intentional, mutual and particular friendships between disabled and non-disabled people will play a crucial part in this task.

[900] Examples include work by established authors (Brock & Hauerwas, 2017a; Clifton, 2018; Goodley, 2017; Swinton, 2016), recent research as yet unpublished (Jacobs, 2019; McLachlan, 2018) and a commentary on the whole bible from the perspective of disability (Melcher et al., 2017) as well as numerous papers.

Appendices

Appendix A – BUGB Disability Questionnaire

1. *What is the **Name** of your Church?* _____ ***Church Postcode*** _____

2. *To which **Baptist Association** does your Church belong?* _____

3. *How many **Members** are there in your Church?* _____

4. *How many of your **Members** commonly choose to describe themselves as **disabled**?*_____
Detail of disabilities (if known) :_____

5. *How many **adults** attend your Church on a typical Sunday?* _____

6. *How many of these **adults**, to the best of your knowledge, would you describe as **disabled**?* _____
Detail of disabilities (if known) : _____

7. *How many **children/young people** are there involved with your Church in a typical week?* _____

8. *How many of these **children/young people**, to the best of your knowledge, would you describe as **disabled**?*_____
Detail of disabilities (if known) : _____

9. *How many **Ministers/Elders/Deacons** do you have who would, to the best of your knowledge, commonly choose to describe themselves as **disabled**?*
Ministers _____ , **Elders** _____, **Deacons** _____, **Other Leaders** _____
Detail of disabilities (if known) : _____

10. *How many people regularly carrying out (in a voluntary or employed capacity) these typical **church responsibilities**, would commonly choose to describe themselves as **disabled**?*
Children/Youth work _____, **Catering** _____, **Cleaning** _____, **Stewarding** _____,
Other (please specify) _____.
Detail of Disabilities (if known) _____

11. *Does your church run or host **special events** with people with **physical disabilities** in mind?* **YES / NO**
If **YES**, give details of events _____

12. *Does your church run or host **special events** with people with **learning disabilities** in mind**?*** **YES / NO**
If **YES**, give details of events _____

13. *Does your church **work in collaboration** with any other local or national agencies providing support for people with disabilities?* **YES / NO**
If **YES**, give details of agencies _____

[For Questions 14-30, simply circle the most appropriate answer]

14. *Does your church provide **educational opportunities** for those in leadership to develop their awareness of and skills for responding appropriately to the needs of people with disabilities?*
Frequently Regularly Occasionally Rarely Never

15. *Does your church provide **local support** for people with disabilities and/or their carers in their own homes?* **YES / NO**
If **YES**, give details _____

16. *How accessible is your building to wheelchair users?*
Fully Partially Not at all

17. *Does your church have a hearing loop?* **YES / NO**

18. *Does your church have signage in braille?* **YES / NO**

19. *How often does your church take account of the needs of visually impaired people in planning services and other events?*
Frequently Regularly Occasionally Rarely Never

20. *Does your church make use of sign language in services and other events?*
Frequently Regularly Occasionally Rarely Never

21. *How often has someone who would commonly choose to describe themselves as disabled asked for and been accepted for* ***baptism?***
Frequently Regularly Occasionally Rarely Never
Detail of disabilities (if known) : _____

22. *How often has someone who would commonly choose to describe themselves as disabled asked for and been accepted for* ***marriage?***
Frequently Regularly Occasionally Rarely Never
Detail of disabilities (if known) : _____

23. *How often does someone who would commonly choose to describe themselves as disabled* ***preach*** *on a Sunday?*
Frequently Regularly Occasionally Rarely Never

24. *How often is someone who would commonly choose to describe themselves as disabled invited as a* ***visiting preacher*** *on a Sunday?*
Frequently Regularly Occasionally Rarely Never

25. *How often do people who would commonly choose to describe themselves as disabled, within* ***your own*** *church community,* ***help to plan and lead worship*** *on a Sunday?*
Frequently Regularly Occasionally Rarely Never

26. *How often do people who would commonly choose to describe themselves as disabled* ***make a significant musical contribution*** *on a Sunday?*
Frequently Regularly Occasionally Rarely Never

27. *How often do people who would commonly choose to describe themselves as disabled* ***read aloud*** *in normal Sunday worship?*
Frequently Regularly Occasionally Rarely Never

28. *How often do people who would commonly choose to describe themselves as disabled* ***pray aloud*** *in normal Sunday worship?*
Frequently Regularly Occasionally Rarely Never

29. *Does your church become involved in action in the local community on issues of disability?*
Frequently Regularly Occasionally Rarely Never

30. *Does your church become involved in wider political action on issues of disability?*
Frequently Regularly Occasionally Rarely Never

Appendix B – Analysis of BUGB Disability Questionnaire

The following is a brief and limited evaluation of the returns from the 2013 survey of Baptist churches carried out by the Disability Justice Group.

Questions 1-8 – members, attendees, children and young people

The total number of formal members of BUGB churches in the survey was 71,468, of whom 3,411 (4.77%) were described as disabled people. The total number of regular attendees was 65,242, of whom 4,183 (6.41%) were described as disabled people. The total of children and young people was 46,107 of whom 727 (1.58%) were described as disabled people.

Questions 9, 10 and 14 – church leaders and activity leaders.

Question 9 concerned the number of disabled people who were ministers, elders, deacons or other leaders. The total for the four categories was 328 (0.46% of church members). Question 10 concerned the number of disabled people who carried out responsibilities for children's or youth work, catering, cleaning, stewarding or other. The total for these categories was 897 (1.37% of attendees). Question 14 asked whether churches provided leaders with opportunities to improve awareness of the needs of disabled people. There is clear evidence that most churches, 900 out of 1,163 responses (77%), rarely or never provided such opportunities.

Questions 11, 12, 13 and 15 – General provisions for disabled people.

These questions concern special events being provided by churches. For people with physically disabled people in mind, only 168 (13.68% of those who answered the question) provided such events. For people with learning disabilities the figure was once again 168 (13.68% of those who answered the question), although not the same churches as for people with physical disabilities. Regarding churches' work with agencies providing support for disabled people there were 230 (18.73% of those who answered the question). Concerning whether the church provides support for disabled people and/or carers in their homes, 250 (20.36% of those who answered the question) provided some support.

Questions 16-18 – Access to church, hearing loops and Braille signage

Question 16 asked about whether church buildings were accessible for wheelchair users, 797 out of 1,200 responses (66.42%), partially accessible 380 out 1,200 responses (31.67%) or 'not all' accessible 23 out of 1,200 responses (1.92%). Questions 17 asked about hearing loops, 958 (78% of responses) did so, and question 18 asked about provision of Braille

signage, 29 (2.36% of responses) did so. The questionnaire did not ask about the provision of wheelchair accessible toilets.

Questions 19-30 – a range of questions about the participation of disabled people in church life.

This set of questions asked a number of questions about the different ways disabled people are participating in a range of aspects of church life. The responses are set out in the table below.

Data for questions 19-30

The text of the questions can be found in Appendix A from page 207.

Que.	Frequently	Regularly	Occasionally	Rarely	Never	Responses as % of questionnaires	No. of blank responses
19.	10%	25%	18%	24%	22%	97%	3%
20.	2%	2%	6%	12%	78%	96%	4%
21.	1%	1%	20%	33%	45%	96%	4%
22.	0%	0%	5%	22%	73%	95%	5%
23.	2%	3%	12%	28%	55%	97%	3%
24.	1%	1%	13%	34%	51%	96%	4%
25.	2%	7%	17%	22%	53%	97%	3%
26.	3%	9%	9%	19%	61%	96%	4%
27.	3%	9%	30%	22%	36%	96%	4%
28.	5%	14%	29%	20%	32%	96%	4%
29.	1%	4%	20%	34%	41%	99%	1%
30.	1%	1%	13%	32%	53%	96%	4%

Summary

There are a number of tentative conclusions that can be drawn from this data. The average percentage responses across all these questions are as follows:

Frequently	Regularly	Occasionally	Rarely	Never
2.37%	6.26%	16.01%	25.30%	50.03%

This suggests that in most churches disabled people are rarely or never involved in the range of activities identified and that churches are rarely or never involved in issues relating to the inclusion of disabled people. From other sources it is clear that churches are often not aware of or involved in the everyday lives of disabled people. Although disabled people are present in Baptist congregations the data suggests that they are not particularly active nor encouraged to be so.

This is supported by anecdotal evidence indicating that non-disabled people are often passive attendees at church services and events. A constant grumble at the minister's meetings I have attended is that a few people in each church end up doing most of the work. I am not aware of any statistical analysis of how actively involved non-disabled people are in Baptist church communities.

Appendix C – Autobiography of Author

Beginnings

I was born in 1965, to parents who were older than was then common. My mother was born in 1923 and my father in 1924. I had an older sister, born in 1962, who died in 1980, and in 1968 my younger sister was born. My father worked in retailing and for a significant period during my younger childhood owned and managed a village post office and general stores just south of Cambridge.

My birth was before the advent of amniocentesis tests that would in later years aid physicians in the diagnosis of many foetuses with spina bifida.[901] My impairment was, therefore, a surprise to both the physicians and my parents.[902] The doctor who supervised my birth at Hatfield Hospital had trained under a consultant surgeon, Mr Ellison Nash, at St Bartholomew's Hospital located in Spitalfields in London.[903] Denis Ellison Nash had a special interest in the surgery to address implications of spina bifida, particularly urological. I was therefore transferred to St Bartholomew's Hospital immediately. An operation was performed to close the open lesion on my back which had left my spinal column exposed. At the time, other hospitals and consultants were likely to adopt a less aggressive 'wait and see' approach, which often led to the onset of infections that proved fatal within a few days. The operation was a 'success' and in addition to this it was decided to not fit me with 'shunts', which were often fitted to reduce the risk of hydrocephalus, a condition closely related to spina bifida. This can cause the head to swell due to impaired control of cerebral fluid pressure, resulting in brain damage and even death. Shunts were unreliable, and it was considered that the risk of fitting one outweighed the risks of my mild hydrocephalus. The only long-lasting effect of this is a slightly enlarged head.

My parents did not take the option of putting me up for adoption or fostering, nor was I placed in residential care. During my early years I had to live within easy reach of a major hospital in case there was a sudden onset of problems with hydrocephalus. I did not learn to

[901] Spina bifida has known allied medical conditions, the most significant of these has, until the late twentieth century, led to death due to kidney failure by the age of 30. With appropriate medical support (often non-invasive and self-managed) life expectancy is now close to that of non-disabled people. Personal discussion with a consultant urologist.

[902] Amniocentesis was not commonly used for this purpose until the mid-1970s. For an outline of Spina Bifida see https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/spina-bifida accessed 8/7/2020.

[903] St Bartholomew's Hospital is commonly referred to as "St Bart's".

walk normally: I either used cumbersome callipers to walk slowly and with great difficulty or relied on a wheelchair.

As I approached schooling age, decisions had to be made concerning whether I attended a special school, the 'normal' route for someone with my level of impairment. Fortunately, my parents decided to fight for me to attend the local primary school, and with the support of our family GP, consultants and others, I entered mainstream education and have remained in mainstream education and then in secular and church employment ever since.

Around the age of seven I gave up attempts to walk as the callipers and my unsteady gait meant that it took a long time to walk even a few metres. With a wheelchair I could cover greater distances with significantly less effort in a shorter time. It was clear that education rather than physical mobility and independence was becoming the priority. I was academically able and formed good friendships with my peers. My parents and those of my closest friends made considerable efforts to ensure that friendships could be sustained outside of school. I did experience some minor bullying, verbal rather than physical. During the early 1970s my parents were also supported by a health visitor who had considerable scope to provide support beyond the immediate follow-up to my younger sister's birth. It was during this time that the first signs of my older sister's mental health problems began to appear.

As I approached the end of my primary education, the same decisions faced me and my family again: special school or mainstream education. After a series of IQ tests, in which I am told I did well, it was decided that I should transfer to a mainstream secondary school along with my peers. Unfortunately, Cambridgeshire Education Authority did not have, or admit to having, any accessible secondary schools, and we refused to countenance the alternative of a special school. After a long search, a secondary school was found in Trowbridge, Wiltshire, which had enabled a young man with spina bifida who used a wheelchair to progress through the school. When I joined the school, Ross was in the 6th form studying for his A-levels. I was in the final year of primary education when we moved to a new house in December 1975, and due to an inaccessible local primary school was admitted to the first year of the secondary school shortly before my 11th birthday. When tensions concerning my inclusion in class activities, timetabling in accessible rooms etc. arose, the fact that I was a

year younger than everyone else was used as a proxy for hostility towards my use of a wheelchair.

I experienced some dissonance between my own abilities and achievements and the low expectations of others during this time. Despite showing consistent aptitude in maths, from primary school and throughout secondary school, my maths teacher told my parents that she did not expect me to be able to pass the O-level exam and insisted on double-entering me for the lower CSE exam. Her attitude towards me was of consistent hostility despite teaching me throughout my time in secondary school. I have also found that people are surprised when they discover that I am well educated, married and in employment.

After my O-levels, which I took at the age of 15, I attended a specialist rehabilitation unit for two weeks. The aim was to gain greater independence from my parents as a stepping-stone towards independent attendance at university. The Occupational Therapist's assessment, made verbally to my mother, was that 'he will be able to get himself up and dressed, in time to cook a meal. Then he will have time to prepare to go to bed.' When challenged about my plans to attend university, independently, the response was that they had no expectation of my being able to attend a university. Having successfully passed my O-levels I studied A-levels, in Physics, Pure Maths and Applied Maths, at the same school. [904]

University and Beyond

Having gained satisfactory grades in my A-levels I applied for and was accepted by Bath University to study for a B.Sc. in Mathematics and Computing. The search for a suitable university and course was made exceedingly difficult by the lack of information about access for wheelchair users to university courses and campuses. The extremely variable attitudes of admissions tutors towards disabled students, from the very supportive through to dismissive and even hostile attitudes, further complicated the process.[905] This seems to be a reflection of the attitude of some in the medical and allied professions who did not expect disabled people to gain a university education.

[904] It was during my first year of A-level study that my older sister became ill and subsequently passed away in January 1980.

[905] Despite the recommendation in the 'Warnock Report' that: "… universities … should formulate and publicise a policy on the admission of students with disabilities or significant difficulties and should make systematic arrangements to meet the welfare and special needs, including careers counselling, of those who are admitted." (*Report of the Committee of Enquiry into the Education of Handicapped Children and Young People*, 1978, p. 144) Accessed 23/05/2019

Although Bath was within easy commuting distance of my home, it was felt by all, especially me, that my experience of University life would be restricted if I lived at home. I was at this stage still dependent on my parents for significant elements of personal care and for transport. Public transport would remain inaccessible to wheelchair users for many years to come. Wiltshire County Council Social Services agreed to financially support my independent living, through the provision of community service volunteers (CSVs) during the whole of my degree course. My contribution, made from what was then known as Attendance Allowance, was put towards the cost of these volunteers to work around the clock with me in the halls of residence, where I lived throughout the duration of my course. After the first year of my course it was decided that this required two volunteers working two days on and two days off, since back up support for when a solo volunteer was off duty or ill proved impossible to arrange with any reliability.

With one or two hiccups in this support, and one or two hiccups in my academic progression, I graduated in 1988 with a third-class honours in Maths and Computing. My course had required me to work for a year with IBM just outside Portsmouth, with similar levels of support through social services and volunteers. It was during this placement year that I learnt to drive, and my parents bought me a car for my 21st birthday.

After graduation I applied to several PGCE courses to train as a primary teacher, but entry was full for the 1989-90 academic year. During that period I worked part-time, doing computer payroll testing for a disability charity, and, more significantly for the long term, lived in a Shaftesbury Society hostel for disabled people in Trowbridge, gaining independence for my personal care needs. Consequently, I lost my entitlement to Attendance Allowance, although I retained entitlement to Mobility allowance, which contributed to the costs of running a car.

I successfully completed my PGCE, studying at what was then Bristol Polytechnic, but in the months that followed found it impossible to find a job in the teaching profession. There are several possible reasons for this. Although there were and are some disabled teachers, they tended to have been teaching successfully for some time before acquiring an impairment/disability through an accident or illness. Headteachers and governors were unwilling to employ a probationer teacher who was reliant on a wheelchair and did not have a proven track record in the classroom. The Education Act (1981) had brought an

expectation that disabled children would be included more often in mainstream schools, but this had not been extended to the inclusion of disabled staff.[906] The Disability Discrimination Act (1995) and Equalities Act (2010) were still many years away, so discrimination on grounds of disability was legal and common. Some head teachers and governors also felt that with a degree in Mathematics I was more suited to secondary education, although I had no intention of working in the cramped classrooms of secondary schools with stroppy adolescents who could easily have tipped me out of my wheelchair.

It was during my studies for the PGCE, while attending a local Anglican church, that I met Ruth, who would become my wife a year later. We recently celebrated our silver wedding anniversary.[907] We do not have children, which is another side effect of my spina bifida. The ability to father children was not considered relevant in the mid-1960s when some investigation and minor surgery would possibly have enabled this to happen. I believe it was assumed that disabled people would be unlikely to marry and have a family. We have been able to afford our own property and make adaptations to enable full access.

Work, Faith and Calling

The need to find gainful employment took me into the computing industry after I had completed my PGCE course and not gained a teaching post. I worked for seven years as an analyst programmer within the airline industry. My wheelchair was not an issue during this period of my life, during which I got married and we purchased our first house. In addition we flew within Europe for short breaks using airline staff discounts.

I had become a Christian during my time at Bath University and worshipped at a local Anglican church where I was as fully included in the life of the church as I wanted to be: playing in the music group, being a member of a prayer ministry team and joining a weekly small group that met in a member's house. I was also included in the life of the church where I met Ruth and in the Baptist church where we worshipped during the first few months of married life.

[906] This implemented recommendations of the Warnock Report (1978) on the integration of disabled children in mainstream education. Its recommendation on the inclusion of disabled teachers had little effect. For the wider impact of Warnock see
https://www.tes.com/news/why-warnock-report-still-matters-today accessed 10/06/2019
[907] In July 2016. Ruth is non-disabled and works as a chartered management accountant.

After moving to Swindon to be close to my job in computing we joined a local Baptist church, where we were both fully engaged in the life of the church. We participated in the music group, a mid-week house group, and other church related activities. In the mid-1990s I sensed a call to the ordained ministry, and the local church were fully supportive of the process of testing this call through preaching, leading services and becoming part of the lay leadership of the church as an elder. I was also given the opportunity to preach and lead the occasional service at neighbouring Baptist churches.

As this process progressed, I met with the local Baptist Association Superintendent, who was the key person in the next stage of the process towards training and ordination. He was supportive of my calling and the process of visiting colleges began.

I was only aware of one wheelchair user training for Baptist ordained ministry up to that point (1995) and they had not entered pastoral ministry in a church context. As a result, there was considerable uncertainty about how this would be achieved. Many of the buildings which housed the five Baptist theological colleges in the UK were far from accessible. Perhaps the most accessible at the time was discounted for personal theological reasons, which have now changed significantly. I eventually applied and was accepted for training at Bristol Baptist College. During the two-day interview process I was surprised that the focus of a one-to-one hour-long meeting was entirely on issues concerning my use of a wheelchair.

Bristol Baptist College worked in close association with Trinity College, which trained Anglican ordinands, and the Methodist college, now closed, training Methodist ministers. During my time at college (1997-2001) the Baptist College relocated to slightly more accessible buildings, which enabled me to be reasonably independent. Trinity College was fairly inaccessible, and I relied on friends, colleagues and the advice of staff to access the library.

One of the aspects of college life that was both most rewarding and most challenging was the regular leading of services and preaching at a wide range of Baptist churches. The personal knowledge of other students and staff provided some indication of churches that were completely inaccessible. I could access churches which I visited, but could not access pulpits, and often could not access raised platforms at the front of church. I observed a

variety of responses to an initial visit, from warm welcome to anxiety. When I subsequently revisited a church, sometimes for several visits, I experienced a warmer and more relaxed welcome.

I entered settlement at the start of my final year of the BA course in the autumn of 1999, along with my peer group at college. However, it took until the summer of 2001 to be called by a church, considerably longer than both my peers at college and the year group below me who graduated in 2001 (entering settlement in autumn 2000). There were echoes of my experience of applying for teaching posts after obtaining my PGCE a decade earlier. There was some discussion during this process of how my disability was disclosed to churches. Rather than it being mentioned in the covering letter from the Association Superintendent (now the Regional Minister Team Leader) it was disclosed at the end of my profile, the Baptist Church equivalent of a C.V. During subsequent periods in the settlement process in the mid-2000s, I did not disclose my disability until I was arranging to meet with church leaders/deacons/elders. This latter approach produced a significantly higher response from churches and subsequent meetings with church leadership teams. It did not lead to a call to the pastorate of a new church and I remained in my first pastorate for 12 years.

It was during the period between graduation in June 2000 and settlement in a local church in June 2001 that I began part-time studies for an MA in Applied Theology, which included a dissertation on models of disability and the response of the church (in general), which was completed in 2005.

Ministry in Local Church, Regional Association, and National Union

Local Church

In the summer of 2001, I was called to be the minister of a small church situated in a former local authority housing estate on the outskirts of a Midlands city. I was to work 80% of full-time, supported by a Home Mission Grant.[908] The church was planted and built in the early 1950s as part of the redevelopment of the town after devastating bombing raids during World War II. There was a Manse adjacent to the church. Both buildings were made accessible for my wheelchair through relatively minor adaptations, partly supported by the

[908] This was due to the limited resources of the church rather than any limitations on my ability to work full-time. I had previously worked full-time in the airline industry.

Access to Work Scheme, which also paid for an electric wheelchair with an elevating seat arrangement.[909] This was extremely useful, for instance it enabled me to preside at communion while standing behind the communion table and converse with people at roughly the same height as them. The most significant alteration, the fitting of a stair-lift at the Manse, was self-funded. In the first years of ministry in the local church I used my 'free-time', the 20% not allocated to the church, to complete my MA studies.

During my ministry in this church, I quickly discovered my passion for connecting church and local community life. I became involved in a range of initiatives that sought to improve the quality of life for residents of an estate which was identified as an area of severe deprivation. This was located within a council ward which was otherwise very affluent. I also engaged with other local churches in a range of activities, which in later years involved setting up a local branch of a food bank.

I quickly found out that when I was hospital visiting it was essential for me to wear a clerical shirt and collar to avoid being mistaken for a patient by hospital staff. I did not conduct any marriages while in pastorate but did conduct funeral services. When conducting funeral services for those within the church community I did not always wear a clerical shirt and collar, but I found it essential to do so when I was conducting a funeral for those on the fringe of church or with no contact. It was clear on several occasions that crematorium staff, and those other than immediate family, were not expecting a minister to be a wheelchair user.

During this period, I did not experience any overt exclusion arising from attitudes towards my being disabled. Usually, my experience was of concern that I should be able to be included in all aspects of church, ecumenical and community life in which I felt called to engage.

Association Life

I arrived in the Midlands at a time of considerable change in the organisation and life of local Baptist Church Associations. Small, county-based Associations were being replaced with larger regional Associations. Area Superintendents, employed by BUGB, (a single position overseeing a number of counties and their Associations, with some support staff) were

[909] See https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work accessed 07/08/2020

replaced with Regional ministers, employed by the association (often operating in teams, with support staff).[910] As a result of this there was a desire to have representation from each area within our local association. I volunteered to be a local representative (group coordinator) for Coventry and Warwickshire, and this began my engagement with Baptist Association life. For several years I convened the local ministers' meeting for those serving in Baptist churches within Coventry and Warwickshire.

I have only experienced welcome and inclusion within the various association roles that I have held. The only issues arising from my use of a wheelchair have been access to the association offices (which have now moved to much more accessible premises) and the occasional problems with association meetings being located in less than accessible local church buildings. I have attended and participated in all of the annual ministers' conferences that the association has facilitated. Since leaving the local pastorate I became a Trustee of our local association and served for one three-year term.

National Involvement

In 2011 I was approached by the Baptist Union of Great Britain to participate in the formation of the Disability Justice Group (DJG), which would work alongside the Women's and Racial Justice groups. This group first met in November 2011. Initially this group drew heavily on members of 'BUild', the Baptist Union Initiative on Learning Disabilities.

During the time that I was involved in the Disability Justice Group we carried out a survey of all BUGB churches in an attempt to gain an understanding of the levels of participation of disabled people. For a variety of reasons this task was not completed. The questionnaire and some analysis of the results are in appendix A and B above. Members of the group contributed to an issue of the Baptist Ministers' Journal which addressed a number of issues relating to disability. Another member of the group and I ran a seminar on disability at the May 2013 BUGB assembly in Blackpool. I have also been involved in running seminars for ministerial students at some of the Baptist colleges. From 2014, the Disability Justice Group began to work more closely with Women's and Racial justice groups.

[910] (Baptist Union of Great Britain, 1998; Baptist Union of Great Britain . General Superintendency Review, 1996) were the reports that influenced the re-organisation of Associations and the move from Superintendents to Regional Minister Teams.

In 2012 I was co-opted onto the Baptist Union Council and attended my first meeting in November of that year. I was approached due to my experience of being a minister of a small church and my involvement in the Disability Justice Group. The structures of Baptist Union of Great Britain and the composition of Council were going through significant changes at that time. One of the changes to the Council was to seek to make it representative in a number of ways. Regarding disabled people, the widely assumed figure of 10% of the population being disabled was taken to indicate that of the 80 or so members of the newly structured Council there should be eight disabled people, either ordained or non-ordained. The realisation that there were not enough disabled people with relevant experience active in the life of the thirteen Associations or the 2,000+ Baptist churches was one of the motivations for my seeking to do research into this issue.

Called to Academic Research

My academic journey has been long and at times convoluted. As already mentioned, I was educated in mainstream schools from the age of five to eighteen. I gained good enough A-levels in Pure Maths, Applied Maths and Physics to gain a place to study for a BSc in Mathematics and Computing at Bath University. I was a pioneer as one of their first disabled students gaining my BSc degree in 1998. After a gap year I gained my PGCE in primary education. Discrimination against the inclusion of disabled people in the teaching profession meant I worked subsequently in the computing industry, within the airline sector, for seven years. I then gained my BA in Theology at Bristol Baptist College. In my final year I wrote a short dissertation which examined ethical issues around the abortion and infanticide of disabled babies. This led into my MA dissertation which looked at three sociological models of disability and the potential implications these have for how the church views disability and relates with disabled people.

My involvement in the BUGB Disability Justice Group led to the initial stages of exploring further study at doctoral level. As the area of study became clearer the opportunity arose to leave local pastoral ministry and pursue my studies which have led to this thesis.

Appendix D – New Baptist Union Ministers' Settlement Process and Papers

Notes to Minister's Nomination Form And Profile

General Comments

The National Settlement Team (NST) require you to complete a nomination profile and a nomination form before they commend your name to the churches or other settings seeking ministry. These notes offer guidance in completing both proformas.

- **The nomination profile** will be seen by all the members of NST. It will be sent, unedited except for the addition of a reference number, to churches and mission settings whenever you are commended to them. The profile is the means by which you introduce yourself to their leadership or search group.

- **The nomination form** is used by NST only and is not shared with anyone else. It acts as a reference for NST when they are considering which names to nominate to which vacancies.

You will notice that question 5 on both proformas is the same. This is deliberate. Please answer in broadly the same way for both.

We strongly recommend that before you complete a nomination profile, you meet with your regional minister. They can discuss with you informally your sense of calling to seek a new ministry setting.

Both proformas are Word documents for ease of editing. **Please do not change the margins, font or format of the text that is there.** You are welcome to format your answers how you wish, bearing in mind that the readers may draw assumptions from the presentation as well as your content of your answers.

You will notice that in the nomination profile, your name and personal details are not revealed until Sections B and C. This is deliberate. Churches and search teams are urged to consider nomination profiles without their first reactions being shaped by assumptions about gender, age, race, or education.

NST will require an electronic copy of both proformas so please e-mail them to your regional Minister once completed. **Please make sure these are in Word** and not as a PDF.

Nomination profile

Section A

The heart of the profile lies in your answers to twelve questions. Please ensure you answer them all except for question 12 which is optional. Please use up to but not more than three pages of A4 to answer all twelve questions.

We hope the questions are self-explanatory, but for the sake of clarity, the following notes in italics may be helpful. They are made as suggestions only – please do not be constrained by them.

1. **How did you come to faith in Christ and what prompted you to enter Baptist ministry?** *Outline in broad terms your journey to faith and ministry, perhaps naming the most significant moments, guidance, encouragements or experiences.*
2. **What have been your recent mission and ministry (or training placement) highlights?** *Outline what in your recent ministry or training has been especially profound or noteworthy. Try not to be too modest here. Allow your readers to see what you have achieved or enabled that has made you rightly proud.*
3. **Which are your strongest ministry skills and how have you used these to serve God's kingdom?** *Name what you consider to be your primary gifts and skills that you are likely to bring to any setting. Name some examples of the fruit of exercising these gifts to date.*
4. **Which areas of ministry do you find a particular challenge?** *Be honest about the areas of ministry that you find hard or are less suited to. No minister can do everything. This is a chance to say where you will need the support or leadership of*

others. No minister is energized by everything either, so you might say here what you tend to find draining.

5. **What are your key priorities for a future ministry setting?** *Explain what you especially hope for in any new setting. You might want to think in terms of completing the sentence, "I would love the chance to…" You might want to exercise a certain gift more; or serve a particular community of people; or develop a church in a certain direction; or step outside the norms of inherited church; or… whatever is on your heart.*
6. **What are your core theological convictions and how do you apply them in ministry and mission?** *Expand on how your understanding of the nature of God, his Son, Spirit, creation, church and mission determines who you are and the way you expect to minister.*
7. **What principles of leadership are important to you and how do they affect the way you lead?** *Outline the way you envisage working within the structure of a church or mission setting. What is your expectation of other leaders and of the whole church or mission community?*
8. **How do you pursue the ongoing development of your ministry? What in your theology and practice has changed as a result of your growth and learning?** *Outline how you go about gaining new understanding or new skills. How do you keep yourself fresh? What has changed in the way you minister as the years have gone by (whether in ministry or training)?*
9. **What practices, habits, interests and hobbies help you to sustain your own spiritual, physical, emotional and relational well-being?** *Outline what you do that keeps your relationship with God grounded, and what brings you joy and helps you to rest and relax.*
10. **How do you connect with and contribute to the wider Baptist family and other Christian partners?** *Outline the ways you encourage and are encouraged by relationships with other Baptists churches, leaders or networks. How important are your relationships with ecumenical partners? What is your relationship with other Christian mission organisations and personnel?*
11. **Why are considering leaving your current position (if you are still at college, please give completion of training as the reason) and how would you describe your relationship with those you will be leaving behind?** *This is a chance to be open about the reasons for moving on. There may be some sensitivity around this question, but an honest answer may help to build trust between you and those who read it.*
12. **Are there any further matters or circumstances you wish to be taken into account?** *This is an opportunity for you to add anything you want the church or mission setting to know. For example, there are personal circumstances which you want to be known from the beginning, or you are half-way through an academic qualification.*

Section B

Please outline your **employment and education history** since leaving secondary education. This should be a clear, chronological account of your main occupation at any one time, including periods of further education, unemployment, travel and so on.

An example layout would be:

Sep 1986 – Jul 1989	University of Sheffield – B.Eng in Mechanical Engineering, class 2.1
Jul 1989 – Sep 1989	Casual bar tender at the Hollies Hotel, Weymouth
Sep 1989 – Mar 1996	Jones and Smith ltd. Various roles from graduate trainee to becoming regional technical sales rep for Yorkshire before being made redundant
Mar 1996 – Sep 1996	Unemployed
Sep 1996 – Jun 2000	Projects Manager – Green and White Cable Company
Jun 2000 – Sep 2000	Travelling in Australia and the Pacific
Sep 2000 – Jul 2003	Minister-in-Training – Bristol Baptist College and Bristol Street Baptist Church. Diploma in Theology, Ministry and Mission.
Jul 2003 – Mar 2010	Minister – London Road Baptist Church, Coventry
Mar 2010 – present	Minister – York Street Baptist Church, Leeds

To avoid confusion, additional training or secondary occupations should not be included under 'employment and education history', but under 'any other qualifications and experience' below. Where it is absolutely necessary to include concurrent roles, these should be included as a single section, for example:

Aug 1983 – Nov 1994	Part Time sales rep for Freemans Catalogues and bookkeeper for Holman and Hunt Enterprises
Nov 1994 – Sep 1996	Full Time bookkeeper for Holman and Hunt Enterprises

Under **any other qualifications or experience,** please list anything you think enhances the understanding of your readers of who you are and what you will bring. For example, you have a performance diploma in violin; you are a trained counsellor; you have just attended a conflict resolution training course; you volunteered at a community café for a couple of years.

Section C

The personal details section is self-explanatory. Note that your name appears for the first time in this section. It is deliberately withheld from the front page as churches and search

teams are urged to read Section A of each profile prayerfully before viewing the name and personal circumstances of each minister. This is so that first impressions may be protected from assumptions about gender, age, race, education, family circumstances or previous employment.

Section D

Once you have completed sections A to C, please ask your regional minister or appropriate college staff member to add their comments. This enables them to affirm your strengths and gifts and draw attention to any facet of your ministry or college formation where you may have been overly modest. They can also write as your advocate if you are presently in a demanding or difficult setting. Conversely, if they feel you have not been wholly open in your profile, they will speak to you about this before they complete Section D. Whatever is written in Section D must be agreed by both you and the regional minister.

Nomination form

Please note which regional association your church or mission setting belongs to. If you are at college and are church-based or mission setting-based, please enter the association to which your placement belongs. If you are at college and are college-based, please enter the association that will represent you at NST. This might be the association in which your college is located or the association to which your sending church belongs. If in doubt, speak to your college and ask about this.

If you are an accredited minister, **please note your accreditation category.** Most ministers are category 1. If in doubt as to your category, your regional minister can access the BU database to find the answer.

Please enter the date of entering settlement. This is the date you submit your fully completed nomination profile and nomination form to your regional minister.

Questions 1 to 5 are there to help NST to match you with vacancies. You can include as much detail as you wish here about your preferences. You are encouraged to be as flexible as possible. This increases the number of possible ministry options, but it also makes room for the surprising call of God to a ministry setting you may not initially have imagined. Some guidance in italics is as follows:

1. **What type of setting do you hope to minister within? Sole pastor; defined role within a team ministry; pioneer; church planter; rural; urban; large; small; traditional; contemporary; charismatic; etc**. *As mentioned above, be as broad as you dare in the type of ministry you would consider. However, if you feel strongly called to a particular form of ministry, please give details of this.*

2. **Would you prefer full-time or part-time? If part time, what arrangement are you seeking? Please be specific about the number of days and what flexibility you have.** *Make it clear what are restrictions and what are preferences.*

3. **What are your financial and housing expectations, and do you have any flexibility?** *Give details of the stipend you currently receive or are seeking. Outline the housing arrangements you either require or would consider, such as a manse, shared ownership, or owning your own home. Please indicate if your family arrangements require any special housing, such as needing more than 3 bedrooms, or disability access. If you own a house that you envisage selling in order to buy one near your next ministry, please arrange an informal valuation so that this can be considered.*

4. **What geographical limitations or preferences do you have for your new setting?** *You are encouraged to be as open as possible to God's leading you to different places. However, it is possible to make some allowance for geographic restrictions or preferences. Please be very clear in identifying what are restrictions such as needing to be within easy distance of an elderly parent, and what are preferences, such as wanting to be situated in the inner city.*

5. **What are your key priorities for a future ministry setting? (This answer should be the same as you answer for Q5 on the nomination profile.)** *Please see notes on question 5 of the nomination profile above.*

Finally, you should agree with your regional minister any **confidential information** that will aid NST in their deliberations. If you are a minister-in-training, you should complete this in conjunction with the appropriate college staff member. It is important that NST members

are aware of any previous difficulties or concerns arising from ministry and any other personal information that may affect a future settlement. The content and wording of this section will be mutually agreed between you and your regional minister or college staff member and will not be passed on to churches unless you give permission. This might include:

- Any difficulties in a previous church, training placement church, or other ministry setting.
- Any specific health concerns that may affect your ministry or settlement needs.
- Any comments about the spouse's involvement in church life.
- Any relevant family concerns.

Minister's nomination profile

Reference: [please leave blank]

BUGB introduction

The characteristics we wish to observe and affirm in accredited ministers are summarised by five 'Marks of Ministry.' A person demonstrating these marks is:

Mature as a disciple of Christ, living an authentic, biblically-rooted, disciplined life.

Accountable to peers, the local church and the wider Baptist family.

Relational in approach to leadership, working collaboratively to build team.

Kingdom-focussed, seeking God's transformation of people and society.

Servant-hearted and sacrificial, modelling humility, faithfulness, generosity and grace.

Churches and search teams are encouraged to look for evidence of these marks as they read each profile.

The name and personal circumstances of ministers are deliberately revealed only in Sections B and C. **Churches and search teams are strongly urged to read Section A of each profile prayerfully before viewing the name and personal circumstances of each minister.** This is so that first impressions may be protected from assumptions about gender, age, race, education, family circumstances or previous employment.

Section A. **Please give your answers to the twelve questions below, taking up no more than three pages of A4.**

1. How did you come to faith in Christ and what prompted you to enter Baptist ministry?

2. What have been your recent mission and ministry (or training placement) highlights?

3. Which are your strongest ministry skills and how have you used these to serve God's kingdom?

4. Which areas of ministry do you find a particular challenge?

5. What are your key priorities for a future ministry setting?

6. What are your core theological convictions and how do you apply them in ministry and mission?

7. What principles of leadership are important to you and how do they affect the way you lead?

8. How do you pursue the ongoing development of your ministry? What in your theology and practice has changed as a result of your growth and learning?

9. What practices, habits, interests and hobbies help you to sustain your own spiritual, physical, emotional and relational well-being?

10. How do you connect with and contribute to the wider Baptist family and other Christian partners?

11. Why are considering leaving your current position (if you are still at college, please give completion of training as the reason) and how would you describe your relationship with those you will be leaving behind?

12. Are there any further matters or circumstances you wish to be taken into account?

Section B. Please ensure this section starts on a separate page.

Please provide the following information.

Your employment and education history, including qualifications gained:

Any other qualifications or experience you feel it is relevant to share. Please include any training courses you have been on in the last two years:

Section C. Personal Details

Name:

Address:

Phone number:

Mobile number:

Email:

Marital status and if married, name of spouse:

Dependents:

(Please do not include date of birth or a photograph)

Section D. Comments from a regional minister or college representative

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Nomination form: [minister's name]

BUGB Introduction

This form is used by the National Settlement Team (NST) when they meet to determine which churches will receive your nomination profile. It will not be distributed beyond the NST. Please complete this in conjunction with your regional minister or college.

What is your current regional association:

Are you currently a ministerial student? YES / NO

If no, please state your category on the BUGB accredited list:

For reference, categories are:

1 = Minister, including children's, youth and families' ministers

2 = Youth specialist (category closed to new entrants since October 2018)

3 = Evangelist (category closed to new entrants since October 2018)

4 = Ministers not presently serving in categories 1, 2 and 3 but whose names are retained on the accreditation register on terms agreed by the MRC.

Date of entering settlement:

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1. What type of setting do you hope to minister within? Sole pastor; defined role within a team ministry; pioneer; church planter; rural; urban; large; small; traditional; contemporary; charismatic; etc.

2. Would you prefer full-time or part-time? If part time, what arrangement are you seeking? Please be specific about the number of days and what flexibility you have.

3. What are your financial and housing expectations and do you have any flexibility?

4. What geographical limitations or preferences do you have for your new setting?

5. What are your key priorities for a future ministry setting? (This answer should be the same as you answer for Q5 on the nomination profile.)

Confidential information – to be completed in conversation with your regional minister or college representative

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Nomination form revised June 2020

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